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ABSTRACT

Not by Bread Alone:

A Study in the Christian Discipline of Fasting

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Using John Wesley's quadrilateral as a conceptual framework, this study focuses upon the spiritual discipline of fasting. Concerned at the relative neglect of this important means of grace I raise two questions relative to the recovery of the discipline for our times. Would Christians fast regularly if encouraged to do so by their spiritual leaders? Would modern believers, introduced to fasting, report advances in their spiritual life.

Chapter 1 introduces the project. It outlines the history of the project and provides a literature survey.

Chapter 2 outlines the occurrence of fasting in the scriptures. In surveying the Old Testament the emphasis is placed upon the theology that fasting is a means for coming before the presence of God. The New Testament study focuses upon the teaching and example of Jesus. I attempt to demonstrate that Jesus affirmed the practice of fasting as an inseparable part of a Christian devotional triad of prayer, alms and fasting.

Chapter 3 traces the development of the fasting

practice throughout the history of the church. Special attention is paid to the practice of fasting among Pentecostals.

Chapter 4 aims to plunder the knowledge and experience of modern Jamaicans who fast regularly. It contains a record of interviews with spiritual leaders among evangelical Pentecostals and with Mother Wyndette, a leader in the quasi-Christian cult of revivalism.

Chapter 5 narrates the journey of fifteen participants in a six week experiment in fasting. Participants committed to fast at least one day per week for six weeks. They met weekly to study scriptures relative to fasting and to process the previous week's fasting experience. Pre-and post-testing reveals a trend of positive spiritual growth as a result of the experience.

Chapter 6 provides a summary and evaluation of the experience. The findings of the project are presented. Some avenues for future research are suggested.

NOT BY BREAD ALONE:
A STUDY IN THE CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE OF FASTING

BY

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of the requirements for the degree of

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c 1989

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AUTHORIZATION

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Signed _____

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Sister Mavis Reid adopted me as her spiritual son. She taught me to fast and to have unshakable faith in God's power to deliver. I will be forever richer from coming to know her.

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CHAPTER 1

The Problem/Opportunity

Visiting the campus of a major seminary, I had the pleasure of meeting a key denominational leader. During our lunch I probed into his practice of fasting (a discipline about which he had written a book). He paused a moment, then with unusual candor confessed, "Actually, I've never done much fasting -- but I've always been interested in it." I think he speaks for most western believers; we haven't the discipline to fast, yet we admire those who do.

The fasting practices that have provided nourishment for the body of Christ through the centuries have been largely abandoned in the last 100 years. A 1977 survey of Muncie, Indiana (considered Middletown, USA for research purposes) revealed that 59% of the population had never fasted. More importantly, of those individuals who had fasted at some time, 72% declared they had fasted only for health or weight loss.¹ Such statistics have caused writers like Father Thomas Ryan to lament, "The art of the why, the how, and the when of fasting has been largely lost in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The habit and practice

¹Joseph B. Tamney, "Fasting and Dieting: A Research Note," Review of Religious Research, 1986, 27:4, p. 245.

have withered along with the sense of God"² (Emphasis mine).

One apparent reason for the "loss of the art" is that the subject is largely ignored by pastors and spiritual leaders. In over twenty years of weekly church attendance I cannot recall hearing a single sermon devoted to the topic. Clerical ignorance of fasting is further evidenced by the scarcity of printed material on the subject from a religious perspective. According to Richard J. Foster in The Celebration of Discipline, not a single book was published on the subject from 1861-1954.³ My personal check revealed fewer than twenty "books" (some with less than 50 pages) in print on fasting from a Christian devotional perspective.

This evidence begs the following questions: How can we recover the power of fasting for our generation? Would Christians fast regularly if encouraged to do so by their spiritual leaders? Would modern believers, introduced to fasting, report advances in their spiritual development? I know of no research on this topic from a pastoral perspective. Until the subject is further investigated these questions will remain unanswered.

²Thomas Ryan, Fasting Rediscovered, (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 75.

³Richard J. Foster, Celebration of Discipline (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 41.

Thesis

In searching a framework for this study I came across John Wesley's quadrilateral: scripture, tradition, reason and experience.⁴ His seems a balanced approach to the task of investigation. I have adopted his methodology as my own, and framed the following Thesis Statement:

We can increase our understanding of and participation in the discipline of fasting by exploring it through the lenses of John Wesley's quadrilateral: scripture, tradition, reason, experience.

We will peer through the lens of scripture by an expository study of major Old and New Testament passages relevant to the discipline of fasting. Key passages include Lev. 16:29-31; Isa. 58; Dan. 9 & 10; Joel 2:12; Matt. 6; Mark 9:29; Luke 5:33-39; Acts 10; Acts 13:2 & 3; and 2 Cor. 6:5.

Through the lens of tradition we will view the historical development of fasting as a Christian discipline. We will note the presence of fasting as an important spiritual discipline in the apostolic age. We will observe the movement from voluntary to obligatory fasting in the Patristic and Middle Ages. We will seek to be aware of the influences of Greek Asceticism and the monastic movement upon Christian fasting. Finally, we will

⁴Student appreciates the guidance of Steve Harper on this point. Albert Outler has written much on this Wesleyan framework.

focus upon fasting as experienced in the tradition of modern day Pentecostalism.

Through the lens of reason we will attempt to "plunder the Egyptians" of our day. That is, we shall seek to explore the knowledge of our contemporaries to gain additional insight. The particular "Egyptians" of this study are Jamaican.

Fellow believers in the developing nations have much to say to us about the practice of spiritual disciplines such as fasting. It is my conviction that a study of the expressions of fasting in the West Indian culture (Christian and quasi-Christian) will enhance our knowledge and understanding of the discipline. This chapter is constructed out of numerous personal interviews with professionals, sociologists, "ordinary" Jamaican Christians and a spiritist. Some of those interviewed are illiterate, others hold graduate degrees. Some are impoverished and powerless. Some are superstitious, nearly animistic in perspective. Others could fit into the upper middle class anywhere in the United States. Through their perspective we hope to gain new light and understanding regarding the discipline of fasting.

The fourth lens of experience will focus upon the adventure of one covenant group which participated in a guided fasting experience. We will describe the process as it unfolded over an eight week period, noting especially

how the focus of our fasting deviated from the original plan. This, we believe, was due to a movement of grace orchestrated by the Holy Spirit. This movement eventually led to the establishment of a major ministry on behalf of the poor in the town of Mandeville.

History of the Project

Four years ago I received my first missionary assignment: The Mandeville, Jamaica, New Testament Church of God. The Mandeville church had been founded one year earlier by Sister Mavis Reid, a kind and gentle laywoman, well known for her weekly habit of fasting and prayer. I soon found that the church's entire theology of ministry revolved around "the power of fasting and prayer." I was somewhat embarrassed at my own ignorance of the subject. I had always reserved fasting for major times of decision-making.

Many of the members had participated in a "fasting fraternity" for years, meeting together for prayer and fasting each Wednesday. At times I made the journey to the cottage where they gathered for the day, but mostly I watched from afar. However, last year I came to the conclusion that keeping regular days of fasting wasn't just a cultural oddity. A fresh look at Church history convinced me that fasting was the heritage of the saints.

I began to practice a weekly day of fasting and have found a confidence in prayer and a singleness of heart not evident in my life before.

This new experience in fasting encouraged me to engage in an academic study of the discipline as well. Joseph Tamney's Ball State University survey in Muncie, Indiana helped confirm my suspicions that religious fasting among American Christians was at a low ebb. Then, in January of 1988, I read Leonard Stadler's Doctor of Ministry dissertation, "John Wesley's Means of Grace in the Spiritual Formation of the Local Church."⁵ His project called for the participation of a small group in a guided experiment in prayer, Bible study, Christian conference, the Lord's Supper, and fasting. By pre- and post-testing Stadler discovered the effect of those disciplines in encouraging positive behavioral and attitudinal changes.

The greatest attitudinal change he noted in his group was toward the discipline of fasting. After a one day fast, members of the group reported a positive change in their attitude. However, the group's behavioral scores were unchanged. This means that while their attitude toward fasting improved, their practice of fasting did not. Would an extended study of fasting alone establish a behavioral change? Would the positive attitudinal changes

⁵Leonard Stadler "John Wesley's Means of Grace in the Spiritual Formation of the Local Church" Diss. Asbury Theological Seminary, 1987.

of Stadler's group remain constant after a more rigorous personal experience of fasting? Anticipating positive answers to those questions, I began to construct a project to test my suspicions.

Nature of the Study

In general I have followed the opinion of Dr. David Moberg and others that spirituality and spiritual growth cannot be measured or calibrated scientifically due to a lack of precise definitions and empirical graphs of measurement. Moberg writes,

Even if there were universal acceptance of the general nature of spiritual well-being, there could be considerable disagreement about the specific indications, traits or symptoms to use in determining the degree of spiritual wellness.⁶

It follows then, that the most appropriate method approaching this project is to rely upon a descriptive form focused on the area of attitudinal and behavioral change in the participants of the study.

Therefore, I will describe the effects of emphasizing a weekly day of fasting on a group of fifteen believers who covenanted to practice the discipline for at least one day per week for six weeks. Participants were pre- and post-tested to note any changes in attitude or behavior toward

⁶David Moberg, "Taking the Measure of Spiritual Well-Being" Theology, News and Notes, (October, 1982): 9.

fasting. As a further means of description participants met weekly to study relevant scripture passages and to process their experience. Those with significant positive or negative experiences were personally interviewed. The group was then re-tested two months after their disbanding to discover if the changes noted in the first post-test continued in the absence of the encouragement of the group process.

Assumptions

In making this study, I assumed a number of things. First, the members of a Christian Fellowship respect the traditional spiritual disciplines as a means of spiritual growth and renewal. Second, the discipline of fasting has a positive effect on spiritual growth in individuals by helping them to focus and open their lives to God's ever-present grace. Third, the decline in religious fasting among Christians is traceable, at least in part, to a lack of teaching and encouragement at the local church level. Fourth, individuals will increase their attention to this discipline if they are encouraged to do so by a respected spiritual leader and by a commitment to a group of their peers.

Literature Survey

Hippocrates, the father of medicine, said, "Abstinence and quiet cure many diseases."⁷ A New York physician, Dr. Allan Cott, took him at his word and established a fasting clinic to treat all manner of medical and emotional problems. His book, Fasting: The Ultimate Diet, (1973) sparked an unexpected popular interest in the practice of fasting. Dr. Cott claims fasting can reduce tension, lower blood pressure and help end dependence on cigarettes, alcohol and drugs. He offers evidence that fasting can be used in the treatment of mental illness and goes on to promote fasting as a way to heightened spiritual awareness and better sex. Cott's bibliography lists over 300 books and articles related to the health benefits of a fasting regimen.

Acceptance by the medical profession has brought about a new credibility for this ancient practice. Within Evangelical circles we are presently witnessing a renewal of interest in discovering the practical and spiritual benefits of fasting. As unlikely as it may seem, Southern Baptist and Charismatic leaders are searching together for a rediscovery of this spiritual legacy.

Charles F. Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church in

⁷Allen Cott, Fasting: The Ultimate Diet (N.Y.: Bantam, 1973), p.49.

Atlanta has become a leading advocate, writing articles in magazines such as Moody Monthly, calling for a renewal of the practice. He promotes fasting especially for its usefulness in helping the Christian to insure that this or her decisions are consonant with the will of God.⁸ Andy Anderson, a Baptist church growth specialist, published his biography, Fasting Changed My Life, in 1977. In it he addresses the benefits of a practice of fasting for purging the soul of any hidden sin. "Fasting . . . becomes most important as the child of God seeks to uncover and repent of every sin, iniquity and transgression that lies unnoticed in his life."⁹ He emphasizes fasts of five to seven days. After such purifying he reports a renewed sense of God's presence and an emboldening of confidence in his ministerial work.

Most Charismatic authors focus on the power of fasting as an instrument for intercession. Derek Prince (Shaping History Through Prayer and Fasting) maintains that world history has been shaped by periods of concerted prayer and fasting. He cites biblical and modern examples and encourages Christians everywhere to unite in prayer and fasting toward the establishment of the Kingdom of God on

⁸Charles F. Stanley, "Fasting," Moody Monthly, (May, 1975), pp. 31-33.

⁹Andy Anderson, Fasting Changed My Life, (Nashville: Broadman, 1977).

the earth.¹⁰ Gordon Lindsay (Prayer and Fasting: The Master Key to the Impossible) sounds a similar note, though not on such a grand scale. He holds that behind every physical situation (e.g. family trouble) there is a spiritual reality (i.e. demonic pressure). He writes,

The fact is that there is a spiritual kingdom composed of principalities and powers. Each Gentile nation has its unseen spiritual ruler. Each earthly kingdom is under sway of organized forces of wickedness which seek to bend it completely to their will...Spiritual powers in high places are dislodged only by spiritual warfare.¹¹

Spiritual warfare is fought through persistent fasting and prayer against the debilitating circumstance. Through such militant spirituality, Lindsay maintains that many of life's "impossible situations" can be overcome.

Arthur Wallis' God's Chosen Fast is one of the most complete works on the subject of spiritual fasting. He deals with most of the major fasting texts and develops a 22-point theology of fasting along the way. His unique contribution to the discussion is an eschatological focus. Wallis sees fasting as a necessity for bringing about the coming of the Lord. Before Christ's return the Last Days prophecy of Joel must be fulfilled. The Spirit of God must be poured out upon the Church as a whole. That day will

¹⁰Derek Prince, Shaping History Through Prayer and Fasting, (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1973).

¹¹Gordon Lindsay, Prayer and Fasting: Master Key to the Impossible (Dallas: Christ for the Nations, 1986), p. 38.

never come except by widespread obedience to Joel's command:

Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God and cry unto the LORD...Therefore also now saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning...And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out of my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions (Joel 1:14; 2:12 & 28 KJV).

The ultimate goal for Wallis is not just "a Charismatic Church," but the return of Jesus Christ. Without a restored Church there is no fit bride. Without a spotless bride, Christ will not come. Without the return of the Savior we perish. For Wallis, only fasting and prayer can bring about the needed visitation of God's Spirit, preparing us to receive the heavenly Bridegroom.¹²

Margaret Miles' book, Fullness of Life (1981) makes a convincing appeal for the necessity of a balanced theology of Christian asceticism in our hedonistic society. Chapter six is her high point. In reviewing four historical models of Christian asceticism, she highlights a number of paradigms and images helpful to Christians struggling for spiritual focus today. She consistently avoids the "body as problem" approach to ascetic theology, and states that

¹²Arthur Wallis, God's Chosen Fast (Ft. Washington, Pa.: Christian Literature Crusade, 1968), p. 132.

Christian asceticism must also presuppose a permanent connectedness of body and soul. The soul should not exhaust itself caring for the body's needs, but it must care first for the body and then proceed to orient the entire human being toward the source of life itself.¹³

Miles focuses upon four models of thought regarding the goal of asceticism. These goals are: (1) Self understanding (e.g. the Egyptian desert fathers); (2) Control of the addictive and deadening agenda of sex, power and possession (early Monastics); (3) Gathering and focusing of energy (Augustine); and (4) Intensification of consciousness (Ignatius of Loyola).¹⁴ The only negative strike against Miles is her personal apologetic which surfaces at times to remake extremists such as St. Antony and Ignatius of Loyola into more acceptable spiritual guides. That said, the book is extremely helpful to those interested in the rediscovery of spiritual discipline.

Eric Rogers' Fasting: The Phenomenon of Self-Denial (1976) is a watershed of research on the subject with a socio-historical slant. He traces the phenomenon of fasting through many cultures and religions, but spends most of his time anchored to the Christian context. He covers three major goals of fasting: protest, health, and religious strengthening. His style is light and readable.

¹³Margaret Miles, Fullness of Life (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), p. 135.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 136.

His research is painstaking. Of special interest were his many anecdotes and illustrations from the lives of both famous and little-known Christians.

Joseph Wimmer's Fasting in the New Testament, provides the most scholarly textual work available on New Testament passages related to fasting. His work is thorough, including much from first century rabbinic literature. Relying upon form criticism, Fr. Wimmer seeks to establish the place of fasting in the apostolic community and its relationship to the historical Jesus.

Another Catholic author, Thomas Ryan (Fasting Rediscovered), approaches the subject theologically. The subtitle, "A guide to health and wholeness for your body-spirit," evidences the holistic approach Fr. Ryan takes in re-establishing a theology of balanced asceticism for our hedonistic age. He writes,

Perhaps the heresy of our time is that temperance and asceticism are anti-modern and inhuman, and seemingly deny the goodness of God's creation. This is clouded thinking.... The universal teaching of the Christian faith, founded on Holy Scripture and the experience of each of us who honestly confronts the selfishness and sin found in ourselves, is that some constant practice of asceticism is a necessary means in order to attain union with God.¹⁵

Finally, Kallistos Ware's explanation of the Greek Orthodox Troidon served as an important contribution from the Eastern Church's perspective. According to Ware, the

¹⁵Thomas Ryan, Op. Cit., p. 28.

Orthodox liturgy teaches that the primary aim of fasting is to increase consciousness of our dependence upon God.

If practiced seriously, the Lenten abstinence from food...involves a considerable measure of real hunger and also a feeling of tiredness and physical exhaustion. The purpose of this is to lead us in turn to a sense of inward brokenness and contrition; to bring us...to the point where we appreciate the force of Christ's statement "Without Me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5).¹⁶

Ware has a high view of the body and a deep regard for Scripture and for the teachings of the church fathers. His balanced teaching is a credit to the Eastern Church's longstanding faithfulness to the discipline.

A Personal Note

Nearly half a century ago, my paternal grandparents "got saved" under a brush arbor erected on a neighboring farm. Embracing Christ, they also embraced the vehicle by which he had been revealed so forcefully to them, Pentecostalism. A few years later my maternal grandparents had the same experience. Their families were never the same.

As a third generation Pentecostal, I continue to find Pentecostal traditions, theology, and world views edifying. My entire life and ministry have been

¹⁶Kallistos Ware, "The Meaning of the Great Feast," Epiphany Journal (Spring, 1985): 41ff.

experienced within the boundaries of that faith.

Consequently, this study, particularly in Chapters 3 and 4, will describe an authentically Pentecostal expression of fasting. The Christians interviewed in Chapter 4 are largely Pentecostal Christians. Their primary theology, fasting as spiritual warfare, is essentially a Pentecostal theology. By working toward a Pentecostal theology the study will integrate with my parish ministry.

I pray that this paper may be of more than academic interest to the reader. Only an experiential faith is adequate for today. And only those who have submitted themselves to an ongoing discipline of fasting can know the fruitfulness of such an endeavor. Fasting changed my life. I wish the same for those who encounter this dissertation.

CHAPTER 2

A Survey of Fasting in the Old and New Testaments

A full stomach shrinks from examining
spiritual questions The love
of God cannot be kindled in a heart
that loves comfort.

Sr. Isaac the Syrian¹

Introduction

Fasting has always played an important role in man's quest for God. In primitive cultures, priests fasted to avert the anger of the gods, farmers to implore the spirits of earth and water, and hunters to insure their luck in capturing their prey. Fasting, for them, was a way of influencing the mysterious forces that controlled their lives.²

The most powerful motive for fasting in ancient cultures was a fear of demons (e.g. Xenocrates' writings). Fasting was common following a death as a means of protecting oneself from the spirit of the departed. Since the soul might still be near, one avoided ingesting anything into which it may have entered (e.g. food or

¹Sir Isaac the Syrian quoted in "Fasting and the Writings of the Church Fathers" Coptic Church Review, V. 6, No. 2, p. 78.

²Eric Rodgers, Fasting and the Phenomenon of Self Denial, (N.Y.: Thomas Nelson, 1976), p.28.

drink).³

Eventually the concept developed that fasting was an effective means of preparing oneself for an encounter with deity. Fasting served to purify the body and to focus and center the attention of the soul. This created a kind of openness to divine influence.⁴ Fasting soon became the ritual of initiation into the mystery religions. In magic and with the oracles it was seen as a preparation necessary for success.⁵

Even today, tribal societies continue the practice of fasting, especially as a rite of passage into adulthood and for those seeking to become tribal shamen. The typical rite involves separating the candidate from the village, either in a wilderness or in a special lodge. The candidate fasts in this seclusion for as many as thirty days. During this time, hunger and exposure combine to create hallucinations and spiritual experiences. Eskimos expect to encounter their "helper spirit" during this period. The spirit may come in any form, usually as an animal (forbidden prey from that time on) and is looked upon as a guardian presence throughout adult life.⁶ The

³Colin Brown, ed., The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, p. 1967) V. 1, p. 611.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Rogers, p. 28.

initiate now returns to the community, whereupon a celebration of feasting, singing and dancing commences.

Fasting was practiced in ancient Egyptian, Persian, Greek and Roman religions, as well as in the eastern ways of Hinduism, Taoism, Shinto, Buddhism and Islam.⁷ Among pagan cultures it is the most common of all religious rites.⁸

Surveying the practice of religious fasting throughout the ages and across cultures, three universally shared beliefs emerge. The first is that fasting purifies. The second is that fasting strengthens one spiritually. The third is that fasting prepares the body and soul to encounter the spirit world. Our exploration of the Old Testament Scriptures relative to fasting will focus primarily upon this third function of fasting.⁹

There emerges throughout the Old Testament a theology that fasting serves as a preparation for intimate

⁷Gordon S. Wakefield, ed., The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality (Philadelphia:Westminster, 1983), p. 147.

⁸Rogers, p. 32.

⁹For a detailed discussion of fasting as a ritual of purification, see Rodgers, Ch. 3; Wimmer, p. 9-30. Much has been written by the medical and health professions of late affirming the therapeutic value of fasting in reducing stress and the levels of harmful chemical additives, etc., in the blood stream. See Allen Cott, M.D. Fasting: The Ultimate Diet for a bibliography listing hundreds of books and articles (N.Y.:Bantam, 1975). See Salem Kirban's How To Keep Healthy and Happy by Fasting (Huntingdon Valley, Pa.:Salem Kirban, Inc., 1976) for the same approach from a Christian author.

conversation with YHWH. To "call a fast" is to announce one's desire to enter the awesome shekinah of the Almighty. The justification for such a daring act is grounded in the covenant and in the neediness of the seekers and their total reliance upon the all sufficiency of El Shaddai. In YHWH's presence the suppliant expects to find a merciful reception and a listening ear (Ps. 34:18; Ps 145:18). The purpose of the fast, then, is to humble one's spirit so as to prepare it for such a meeting. (Encountering the Holy One in the wrong frame of mind often proved fatal, e.g. Nu. 16:30f.)

In an attempt to focus upon this one aspect of fasting we will undoubtedly pass over much Old Testament material that might be interesting and informative otherwise. For example, we will not concern ourselves with the Hebrew practice of fasting as an expression of sorrow after a catastrophe, or with fasting as an evidence of contrition and confession of sin. In this way we hope to give more satisfying attention to what we perceive as the spiritual and scriptural germ of thought, fasting as a means of coming before YHWH's presence.

For centuries the practice of fasting held great meaning for the covenant people. It received particular impetus during and after the exile. By the time of Jesus, however; the fasting practices of Israel had become ritualized and sterile. The sense of expectation and hope

melted away. Gone too was any anticipation of a mighty act of YHWH in response to prayer and fasting. Fasting had become the twice-weekly public mourning rite of those specializing in superficial piety, a monologue, not a conversation.

We will focus our New Testament study upon the fasting experience of Jesus and on His teaching concerning fasting. We will demonstrate that, far from abandoning the discipline, Jesus re-established it as part of a Christian devotional triad of almsgiving, prayer and fasting. He further proclaimed it as an ingredient of authentic apostolic ministry during the period of waiting between his ascension and parousia. We will see, that the teaching of Jesus builds upon the Old Testament foundation of "fasting as a means to intimate conversation with God." He will amplify the tradition by adding Christocentric and eschatological emphases. Our overall intention is to demonstrate that the practice of voluntary fasting is called for by both the Old and New Testament records and should be renewed within the church today.

Old Testament Roots

According to the Old Testament account, the greatest tragedy in human history was occasioned by the physical appetite for food.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. (Genesis 3:6 KJV)

Unrestrained appetites brought ruin upon others in the biblical drama as well. Esau lost his birthright out of his hunger for Jacob's porridge. The inhabitants of earth in Noah's day carelessly spent their time in "eating and drinking" until the flood took them away. The children of Israel felt the wrath of YHWH more than once over "desiring the delicacies of Egypt." Even the mighty king Belshazzar learned the penalty for ungoverned revelry. His impious feast was interrupted by the hand of God publishing a death sentence on the wall of the great banquet hall.

The moral of these stories is that physical appetites are linked to spiritual attitudes and must be controlled. A bridle for gaining this mastery is the discipline of fasting. The Hebrew word sum is variously translated "to fast," "not to eat bread" (2 S. 12:17) and "to bow down one's soul" (Lev. 16:29). The term embraces both fasting (non-eating) and abstinence (restricted diet).¹⁰

Though the Jewish diet was restricted at all times, the Day of Atonement was the only fast mandated by Moses in the Law. Yom Kippur, as it is known today, is marked by a

¹⁰William J. McDonald, editor-in-chief, New Catholic Encyclopedia (N.Y.:McGraw-Hill, 1967), V. 1, p. 850, hereafter referred to as NCE.

twenty-six hour total fast (no solid or liquid) from dusk till darkness of the next day.¹¹ Other special days of fasting were called in times of national distress.

Voluntary private fasting was a characteristic of many Old Testament leaders. The fasting "hall of fame" includes such notables as Moses, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Nehemiah, Daniel, Ezra and Esther. Largely due to the example of exilic and post-exilic prophets fasting rose to become an important religious activity in the later Jewish community.

Scanning the Old Testament narrative we can discern five major motives behind the Jewish practice of fasting:

1. Fasting as preparation of heart to receive a special experience of the divine presence, especially in times of crisis (e.g. Moses, Elijah, I Sam. 7:6ff Samuel vs. the Philistines)
2. Fasting as an expression of sorrow after a catastrophe (I Sam. 31:13; II Sam. 3:35)
3. Fasting to discern the will of God clearly (Dan. 10)
4. Fasting as an expression of humility and a confession of sin (Generally it was hoped that such contrition would arouse divine compassion and mercy, thus averting some foreshadowed judgement, e.g. Jonah 3:5ff)
5. Fasting as a rite of purification (Lev. 16:29,

¹¹Modern Judaism celebrates Yom kippur as the culmination of ten days of penitence, beginning on Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year). Rosh Hashanah is itself preceded by approximately 30 days of reflection on the past year. Four other fast days are held, each commemorating a time of divine displeasure and national catastrophe. For more see Rogers, p. 33f.

31; 23: 27, 32; Isa. 58:3)

The Hebrew understanding of what it means to fast is grounded in the Law of Moses, the constitution of the nation of Israel. Fundamental to Israel's participation in the covenant was her understanding that YHWH, above all, was a "holy" (qados) God. Perhaps the best definition of the term "holy" is "unique." Later the word came to have ethical connotations as well, yet from the first, it was enough for Israel to know that YHWH was unique. He was not like any of the other gods. He was high above them--the maker of heaven and earth (Ps. 102; Isa. 37:16). He was not like man, frail, vulnerable, changeable and imperfect (Deut. 32:40, Deut. 29:29). He was YHWH and his very name was holy (Lev. 20:3).

Subsequent to their deliverance from Egypt, Israel struggled forty years to come to grips with this idea of holiness. A Holy God, they learned painfully, must be respected. By nature of their association with Him anything or anyone belonging to Him became holy as well and worthy of reverence. According to Colin Brown,

The basic idea [of "holy"] is not separation...but the positive thought of encounter which inevitably demands certain modes of response...Hebrew worship was particularly concerned with this encounter.¹²

At times the Israelites became calloused or casual toward His holiness and ventured lightly into His domain,

¹²Colin Brown, DNTT, V. 2, p. 224.

treating His property and presence as "common" or profane. At such times YHWH's holiness flashed forth as a consuming fire to purify (qados, make holy) the camp of Israel. These tragic confrontations ultimately instilled within Israel an understanding that men and women must prepare themselves well before coming near "the fearful presence."

It is with this in mind that Moses established fasting permanently as a fixture within Judaism. Leviticus 16:29-31 legislates a permanent day of fasting in preparation for Yom kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement,

This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves [i.e. fast], and not do any work...because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins (NIV).

A further regulation occurs in Lev. 23:14 prohibiting the eating of any of the first fruits of the harvest until burnt offerings, cereal offerings and a libation to YHWH, the owner of the harvest, were made. Lest Israel take lightly the mandatory fast connected with Yom kippur the regulation is repeated twice more in Lev. 23:27 and 32.

Understanding fasting as an instrument of sanctification and preparation for divine nearness is further developed in the Old Testament narrative, but it begins here on the Day of Atonement where all of Israel gathers around the holy altar, fully expecting an encounter with the holiness of YHWH. They come laden with sin and unworthiness. Their only hope of surviving the

encounter with His presence lay in their brokenness and humility before Him. The physical denial of fasting was expected to help create the proper spiritual bearing for such an encounter.

Fasting and Prayer

Throughout the Old Testament, fasting is inseparably linked with prayer. Prayer, conversation with God, was the heartbeat of Israel's covenant relationship. Exodus 24 records the intimacy in which the covenant between YHWH and Israel was first confirmed:

Then Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel went up into the Mountain. And they saw the God of Israel; under his feet there seemed to be a pavement of brilliant sapphire stones, as clear as the heavens. Yet, even though the elders saw God, he did not destroy them; and they had a meal together before the Lord." (Ex. 34:9-11 LB).

The last phrase is the most significant. "They had a meal together before the Lord." This is the true spirit of the covenant (Deut. 33:27). The relationship between Israel and her God is characterized by an intimacy unknown in the pagan nations. Hans Schonweiss, Doctor of Theology at Stuttgart, comments, "In the Old Testament prayer is all important because of that which both characterizes and constitutes the Nation of Israel, his relation to his God. The whole history of Israel is therefore permeated and

borne along by prayer."¹³

Upon the completion of the temple, YHWH appears to Solomon affirming the temple as a place of access for His covenant people, even in their times of backsliding.

When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place...my eyes and my heart will always be there. (II Chr. 7:13-16 NIV).

Even in wrath YHWH remains accessible and open for conversation.

The Jews in Joel's day desperately needed to return to their Lord and seek his face in order to stay the outpouring of wrath about to obliterate them. YHWH details the conditions necessary for such a meeting. "Now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12 KJV). To encounter the presence of a holy God in a state of mental and spiritual defilement spelled certain destruction (Ex. 28:43; Lev. 10:1-3). Fasting offered help in establishing the right attitude of heart by which to approach the fearful presence with confidence.

¹³Hans Schonweiss, "Proseuchomai" in DNTT, V. 2, p. 862.

Fasting for Access in Times of Crisis

Most Old Testament fasting occurs, not in times of backsliding, but in times of personal and corporate crisis. Elijah enters into a divinely ordained fast of forty days while fleeing the wrath of Jezebel (I Kings 19). By the end of his wilderness fasting journey he is prepared for a personal encounter with YHWH on the top of a mountain. "And behold, the Lord passed by" (v. 11). After encountering various expressions of YHWH's holiness, Elijah finally hears the "still small voice" and is forever changed. Never again does he run from confrontation with man or woman. As perhaps the ultimate seal of divine approval, he is even spared the ordeal of death and is raptured to heaven by a chariot of fire.

Fasting for Information

Ezra, acting in faith, abandons his position in Babylon to work for the restoration of Jerusalem. God moves upon the heart of Artaxerxes to send great wealth with him for the work of rebuilding. Camping on the edge of a perilous wilderness, without a military escort, Ezra realizes his own vulnerability.

For I was ashamed to require of the King
a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us
against the enemy in the way: because we had
spoken unto the King saying, 'The hand of our

God is upon all them for good that seek him, but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him' (Ezra 8:22 KJV).

Ezra desperately needed a conversation with the Lord that he might discern which route to take across the hostile desert.

Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river...to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones and for our substance...so we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was entreated of us....And he delivered us from the hand of the enemy (vss 21, 23, 31).

After losing two major battles and encountering casualties of 40,000 experienced soldiers, the people of Israel resort to fasting. Clearly, that their cause was righteous and their hearts were right toward God. Still, they had lost 40,000 men in a battle against 26,700 backslidden Benjamite warriors. Israel needed to hear the mind of God regarding this campaign.

Rather than "trying harder" a third time, the army retreats to Bethel and sits there weeping and fasting before the Lord, clearing the channels of communication. Humble and broken, Israel waits before the Lord all day. Finally, after the evening sacrifice YHWH speaks, "Go, for tomorrow I will give them into your hands" (Judg. 20:28 NIV). A new strategy develops which uses the pride and self confidence of the Benjamites to defeat them. The next day 25,100 Benjamites are destroyed. All their towns are to the ban.

Fasting to Intensify Intercession

From these stories and many others we come to realize that for a Hebrew, prayer (tepillah) is mostly a matter of making petition. To approach YHWH with a need is seen as an illustration of one's confidence in His supreme power. By contrast, seeking the help of the physicians rather than that of YHWH is related as the cause of Asa's death in II Chron. 16:12.

In many instances fasting unites with prayer as a means of intensifying the efficacy of one's petition. Prayer and fasting are never seen as ends in themselves but as functional tools. Intense fasting-prayer is expected to prevail in the granting of one's request. Contrary to the assertion of Leslie Hoppe,¹⁴ the Hebrews did not conceive of fasting as a means of manipulating YHWH or forcing Him to act against His desires. Joseph Wimmer writes,

The Israelites were well aware of the independence of God, and though they might hope that he would be influenced by their penitential fast . . . they knew that the source of divine assistance was his own goodness and

¹⁴Leslie Hoppe, "Isa. 58:1-2 Fasting and Idolatry" Biblical Theological Bulletin, V. 13, n. 2, Apr. 83, p. 44ff. Hoppe's attempt to demonstrate Isaiah 58 as a blanket rejection of fasting in Israelite religion as a form of idolatry was soundly discredited by Michael L. Barre' in the July issue of the same periodical.

gracious, merciful love.¹⁵

David enters into a seven day fast with this in mind in II Sam. 12:16ff. As punishment for the murder of Uriah the Hittite, YHWH decreed the death of David's son. "And the Lord struck the child . . . and it was very sick" (v. 15). Nevertheless David prostrates himself upon the bare earth, refusing food, beseeching God's mercy upon the babe.

Doubtless, the prayer of David that week, followed a typical Hebrew pattern. The Hebrew knows that YHWH is a person. "Therefore, he prays in a thoroughly personal and specific fashion, aware that he is actually speaking to God, not merely invoking some dumb deity (Gen. 28:22-33; I Sam. 1:10f; Ps. 77:1-11)." ¹⁶

The Israelite approaches God as a member of the covenant people, not an individual (Ps. 35:18; 111:1). He knows that YHWH hears his prayer (Ps. 65:2) and that He will answer it if it is compatible with His will. Often in the case of intercession, the conversation develops into a veritable wrestling match with God (Ex. 32:11-14; Num. 14:13-22; Deut. 9:26-29, Neh. 1:4-11). In this struggle the suppliant reminds God of His promises, of His mighty

¹⁵Joseph F. Wimmer, Fasting in the New Testament (N.Y.: Paulist, 1982), p. 9.

¹⁶DNTT, V. 2, p. 863, This stands in stark contrast to the pagan mindset typified by the prophets of Baal in I Kings 18:26ff. Their prayer evidences no awareness of any personal relationship with Baal but is rather, a mechanical attempt to manipulate the deity by their torrent of words and strenuous physical exertion.

deeds of the past, and of His nature of mercy and grace. He may even claim that YHWH's honor and reputation are at stake (Num. 14:13ff).¹⁷ From beginning to end, intercession is bathed in thanksgiving for grace extended by God in times past under similar circumstances.

Though David fasts and prays intensely, YHWH is unmovable. Justice prevails over mercy. The child dies. The time of travail, however, has not been wasted. For the first time in over a year David's heart is in tune with God's. He quickly resigns himself to the wisdom and power of YHWH, arises, bathes, and worships in the house of the Lord. Thereafter the blessing of God returns upon David and, remarkably, upon his union with Bathsheba. Another child is conceived; David names him "Peaceful" (Solomon). "And the lord loved him" (v. 24).

All of this puzzles to David's servants. They cannot understand David's use of fasting for petition rather than mourning. He explains, "While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me that the child may live. But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? (v. 22-23 KJV).

David's meeting with YHWH involved intercession over a personal matter. Similar to this is the story of Hannah who, refusing her double portion of food, lays before the

¹⁷Ibid., p. 863.

Lord "in bitterness of soul" weeping and pleading for even one man child. She vows to raise him as a Nazarite and to "lend him to YHWH as long as he lives." Her fasting arises "out of the abundance of (her) complaint and grief" (I Sam. 1:16).

The Spirit of the Lord conveys to Eli, the negligent priest, YHWH's attitude toward Hannah, "Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant there thy petition" (v. 17). The conclusion is anticipated: "So the woman went her way and did eat and her countenance was no more sad . . . and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the Lord remembered her" (V. 18-19).

Fasting in National Intercession

At other times fasting is used to strengthen intercession in matters related to the welfare of Israel as a nation. One example of this is the story of Esther who, to avert the scheduled slaughter of the Jews by Haman, has to risk entering the king's presence unbeckoned. Presumption had already caused the removal of the previous queen, Vashti. Esther's act would be considered even more arrogant and would subject her to the possible penalty of death. In such a dilemma, she reasons, only one course of action is appropriate. She calls upon all of Israel, "Fast for me, and neither eat nor

drink for three days, day or night: I also and my wardens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the King" (Esther 4:16 KJV).

In her words, "Fast for me," she reveals her understanding of fasting's purpose. Mordecai and the Jews were already fasting as a sign of mourning their inevitable ruin (v. 1). Esther calls upon them to channel their fasting into intercession for her.

For Esther, fasting provides the agency by which one dares to attempt the impossible for God. With the prayers of Israel intensified by fasting, and focused specifically upon her and her proposed course of action, she is emboldened to approach the King.

After being accepted by the King, one would expect her to blurt out her petition at once. Her own fasting, however, provides her the discernment to see that she cannot risk a head-to-head encounter with Haman. His powerful influence cannot be so quickly challenged. Instead, she piques the King's curiosity, withholding her request, asking only that he and Haman attend a banquet in their honor. Carefully Esther postures herself to gain favor with the King. Her graciousness causes Haman to relax his guard.

That night God responds to the fasting and prayers of Israel by bringing insomnia to King Ahasuerus. Having the chronicles of his kingdom read to him, he discovers the

unrewarded service of Mordecai the Jew in saving him from an assassination attempt. He makes plans to honor Mordecai.

At the conclusion of Esther's second banquet, the King again approaches her with the question "What is they request? And it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom" (7:2 KJV). With the atmosphere now thoroughly conducive to her gaining the upper hand, Esther reveals Haman's plot to destroy the Jews and her with them. Enraged at Haman (and himself?), the King goes to the garden to think, returning in perfect time to catch Haman, fallen upon the Queen's bed, pleading for his life. Haman is executed. The Jews are saved. The fasting of Israel has brought the peril of the nation to the attention of their protector and has unleashed his arm of deliverance. This event is hereafter commemorated in Israel by the feast of Purim.

Fasting in Isaiah 58

Isaiah 58 is written in protest of the ritualization of fasting among those invested with the spiritual leadership of Israel. Verses 1-12 form the pericope for consideration.¹⁸ In verse one YHWH lays the charge of

¹⁸Verses 13 and 14 seem somehow disconnected to 1-12 both in tone and content. Most scholars treat them as a different pericope.

"rebellion" at the feet of those clothed in sackcloth and ashes. The initial evidence He produces is, surprisingly, their meticulous obedience of cultic ritual and their eagerness to hear the Law and to approach His holy place (v. 2). Exhibit "B" is a comparison of their daily social behavior with their professed perfection in embracing the covenant laid down by their Holy God centuries before. Israel's leaders are in rebellion against the true spirit of the covenant and all of its attendant manifestations (the Law, the cultus, etc.). Their rebellion is nowhere more evident than in their current attitude toward, and practice of, fasting.

Israel's backslidden leaders found fasting irritating, discouraging and unrewarding. "Why bother?" They complain to God, "You haven't even noticed us" (v. 3). The Living Bible translates the next phrase, "We have done much penance, and you don't even notice it!" [i.e. you have not rewarded us tangibly].¹⁹ How could God fail to see their humility? They were clothed uniformly in sackcloth, and covered with ashes of mourning. All day long they lay prostrate, repeating the prayers of dereliction calling for the restoration of Jerusalem and the Temple.

¹⁹The fasting to which Isaiah referred may have been the same one mandated in Zech. 7:3, 5; 8:19) by the exilic community to commemorate the destruction of the temple in 587 B.C.

Contrary to their implication, YHWH is not unjust. He replies in verse 4 that their legalistic, mechanistic theology of fasting is a clear indication of their overall arrogance and idolatry of self. On the day of the fast they give their true mental attention to their private business affairs. They underpay and abuse those under their power (evidence that the pericope is addressed primarily to wealthy clerical rulers). They manifest an unrestrained spirit of contention and violence. YHWH is adamant; "You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high" (v. 4).

This reply seems to support our underlying premise that fasting was divinely instated to prepare and provide special impetus for the covenant people. Through it they gain access for a spirit-to-Spirit encounter with their Suzerein in times of need. Their desecrated form of fasting has not been blessed. Furthermore, the prophet implies that their fasting is actively hindering the restoration of the Holy City.²⁰

Verses 6-12 contrast the ritualized fasting of the hypocrites with "true fasting" and its attending reward. The verses call for return to the ancient foundation of Jewish fasting. The contrast may best be seen by juxtaposing the characteristics of each as follows:

²⁰Hoppe, p. 46.

Unacceptable Fasting (v. 1-5) God's Chosen Fast (v. 6-12)

Visibly manifested through sackcloth, ashes, and prostration (v. 5)

Visibly manifested through concrete acts of righteousness

Pursues purely personal agenda (v. 3a)
Does not affect carnal lifestyle (v. 4)

Focuses on corporate vs. individual identity
Compels one to be spent on behalf of the covenant people v. 12

Does not interfere with economic and social oppression by those with power (v. 3,4)

Calls forth "potentially risky" acts of deliverance on the behalf of those oppressed (vv. 6, 9, 10)

Reward:

1. Denied access to YHWH (v. 4)
2. The offended holiness of God actively resists the prosperity of the faster (vv. 31, 4b)

Reward:

1. Welcomed into the Presence and knowledge of YHWH (v. 11)
2. Suppliant enters into the manifold blessings of the Lord. e.g.
3. Enlightenment (8a)
4. Resolution of present ills (8a)
5. Personal sanctification (8b)
6. Nearness of God as protector (8c)
7. Immediate access to YHWH (9a)
8. Speedy reply in time of distress (v. 8-9)
9. Divine guidance (v. 11)
10. Budding health (v. 11)
11. Constructive, industrious descendants

We must see this passage in context. The pericope before us is part of a larger description of the hopelessly backslidden condition of Israel. The lament ends with 59:15a, "Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey" (NIV). At this point

the prose takes wings. The balance of the text is unparalleled in ancient literature for beauty, theological content and depth of imagery. The plan of salvation is clearly and powerfully revealed.

YHWH perceives that virtually all power has fallen into corrupt hands. For the sake of his own righteousness, he must intervene directly. "He saw that there was no one . . . to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins," declares the Lord (59:16, 20 NIV).

Like Joel (2:12), Isaiah sees a return to sincere fasting (Ch. 58) as a necessary precondition for any form of national repentance. The return to true fasting called for in Isaiah 58 and Joel 2:12, 16 is designed to prepare at least a righteous remnant for the day of the Lord. This intermarriage of fasting and eschatological expectation (messianic hope) informs the fasting theology of Israel even to the present.

Many generations afterward, a fearless John the Baptist will revive the Jewish hopes and expectation that "the day of Israel's visitation" approaches. Jesus of Nazareth, Isaiah's prophesied "redeemer," will himself affirm fasting as an expression of eschatological hope and as a means of preparing to face the day of the Lord. Thus, Isaiah 58 forms a natural theological bridge to the

teaching and fasting practice of Jesus the Christ.

Summary of Fasting in the Old Testament

Though fasting appears in a variety of settings, it consistently serves as a means of bringing covenant people "before the Lord." Through fasting, Israel expects to encounter the Spirit of the Lord more directly in order to be cleansed of sin, to obtain divine information and direction, or to make petition for themselves as individuals or as a nation. It is notable that Jewish fasting, until the time of Christ, exists without a hint of Greek dualism. Joseph Wimmer writes,

Fasting is never mentioned in biblical or rabbinic texts as the means of being released from dependance on a sinful body. Its focal point was not the spiritual superiority of the one who practiced it but the humbling of the self before an omnipotent God.²¹

Fasting in the Apocrypha

From the time of the exile, fasting seems to grow in importance as a mark of Jewish piety. It is emphasized throughout the Apocrypha, notably in the popular historical novel of Judith. The Book of Judith portrays the ideal post-exilic Jewish widow as one who fasts every day. Holofernes, a foreign general, beseiges Jerusalem

²¹Wimmer, p. 17.

causing starvation and severe thirst to the Jews. Judith's fasting piety allows her to understand that God will deliver the Jews through her. Using her striking beauty, she gains entrance alone to the tent of Holofernes and leaves with his severed head in her handbag.

In other Apocryphal works fasting remains prominent, but is given a different emphasis than that of the Old Testament. In the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (C.200-174 B.C.) Simeon afflicts himself with fasting for two years "in the fear of the Lord" as a means of overcoming the spirit of envy. Joseph fasts for victory over sexual temptation. Even in Pharaoh's dungeon he continues to fast and pray. The story concludes, "See now, my children what great things patience and prayer with fasting accomplish" (T Jos. 10:2). Fasting as penance for the sin of fornication and greed are mentioned in the Testament of Reuben 1:10 and the Testament of Judah 19:2. A similar view of fasting for absolution of sin occurs in Ps. Sol. 3:8.²²

These apocryphal accounts of fasting illustrate the change that was occurring in the Jewish theology of fasting during the period of hellenization. Fasting became conceived of as a power unto itself, a means of overcoming vice (T. Sim. III, 1-6), atoning for personal sins (Ps.

²²For a summary of apocryphal and intertestamental fasting see Wimmer. pp. 9-29.

Sol. 3:8), and doing penance (Vita Adae et Evae VI, 1).²³ By the time of Christ the Jewish practice of fasting was far removed from the simple piety that marked fasting in primitive Judaism.

New Testament Beginnings

By the time of Christ, national fasting had fallen into disuse and would not be revived until the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D.²⁴ The fasting tradition was, however, very much alive with "reformation groups" such as the Pharisees and the disciples of John.

In Jesus' parable, a Pharisee boasts, quite accurately, of fasting two days per week (Luke. 18:12). Apparently striving to keep the letter of Joel's command (Joel. 2:15), the Pharisees sanctified Mondays and Thursdays for fasting, announcing it by "blowing a trumpet in Zion," by putting on sackcloth and disheveling their appearance. These were market days when their devotion would be most obvious to the "sinners" in Israel. Such publicity drew the scorn of Jesus. He charged his followers not to fast "as the hypocrites do" (Mt. 6:16f).

John the Baptist might well be called "the first

²³Wimmer, pp.9-14.

²⁴Milton E. Poole, Fasting, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1971), p.11.

Christian ascetic." Renouncing the decadence of Israel he withdrew to the wilderness, practicing a life of rigorous self-denial. His disciples followed his path of renunciation, holding mournful fast days, calling Israel to repentance. Like the Pharisees they were meticulous keepers of the ceremonial law. R. Alan Cole calls John the Baptist, "a bastion of orthodox Judaism."²⁵ Though weekly fasting was not required in the Law of Moses, it had become a common practice among the most devout Jews of the first century. It seems that the disciples of John faithfully followed the custom of the day.

Fasting in the Desert

All three synoptics begin their account of the ministry of Jesus by telling the story of his forty day fast. Many interpretations of this fast and its significance have arisen throughout history. Tertulian wondered if Christ's fast was intended as a model for all newly-baptized Christians. After stating his objections, he concludes that it was, since fasting "drives out the temptations which come through a full and immoderate

²⁵R. Allan Cole, "Mark" Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), p. 70. Even the Pharisees admitted as much in Luke 5:33.

stomach."²⁶

Mark's account is by far the briefest. After being baptized, Jesus comes up out of the water (1:10) and sees the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descending. A voice comes from heaven, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (v. 11 NIV). "At once," writes Mark, "the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals and angels attended him."

To grasp the profundity of Mark's terse account we must see the text within the thematic context of the desert in Mark's prologue (1:1-13). William Lane asserts that these thirteen verses supply the key to the entire Gospel.²⁷ Each detail in the Marcan account is rooted in the Old Testament wilderness tradition.²⁸ The Baptist appears suddenly crying in the wilderness (1:3). There his ministry gains momentum. To this wilderness Jesus is drawn, baptized and confirmed in his sonship and messianic identity. In the wilderness Jesus encounters a particularly powerful experience with the Spirit. The Spirit of God appears in a visible form which physically

²⁶De baptismo 20; CSEL XX, p. 217. Ambrose, Ephraem, Hilary of Poitiers, Augustine and Leo the Great held similar views according to Wimmer, p. 31.

²⁷William Lane, Mark, New International Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 39.

²⁸U. W. Mauser, Christ in the Wilderness (London: n.p., 1963) p. 98.

descends upon him. An audible voice silences any questions within his heart, "Yes, you are my Son." The words hardly have time to echo through the canyon before Jesus is seized by the Spirit and "thrown" (ekballo) or "driven" further into the wilderness. Says Lane, "the Spirit does not allow him to abandon the wilderness after his baptism."²⁹

For the Hebrew, the desert was "a gloomy place of fear, the abode of devils and unclean beasts."³⁰ To remain in the wilderness is to enter the domain of all spirits. One who stays in the desert will certainly fall into temptation (Heb. 3:8; Mt. 41) and will thus be tested by God (Heb. 11:17; Jer. 20:12; Ps 7:9).

Jesus remains there forty days. The time is symbolic, reminiscent of Israel's sojourn and of Moses' fasts on Mt. Sinai during which he encounters the very presence of YHWH. Elijah too fasted forty days as he journeyed from the juniper tree to Mt. Horeb. He found testing and discouragement along the way but in the end heard the "still, small voice" of God and was transformed.

Jesus' determination to remain in the desert under submission to the Spirit, led to an inevitable confrontation with Satan, the enemy of God. Mark does not telescope the period of testing into specific events as Matthew and Luke do. Nor does he record the victory of

²⁹Lane, p. 59.

³⁰Cole, p. 59.

Jesus over Satan. Consistent with Matthew (1:4) and Luke (1:4), Mark does not indicate an end to Satan's temptation of Jesus after this fast. (Jesus' remarks at the last supper [Luke 22:28] indicate that he experienced numerous temptations throughout his ministry.) Nor does Mark limit the ministry of angels to a period following the forty days. According to U. W. Mauser, "Mark thinks of the temptation, the being with animals, and the service of angels as continuous events in the course of which all the forces of God and Satan are simultaneously present."³¹

One detail recorded only by Mark is that besides battling Satan, Jesus also faced the perils of being alone with "the wild beasts" (v. 13). Seeing Mark's reference to "wild beasts" in the context of the wilderness motif, allows us to grasp its seriousness. In the Old Testament, blessing is primarily associated with cultivated and settled land, safe places to dwell and grow fat. The desert is the place of the curse.³² Lane comments,

In the wilderness there is neither seed nor fruit, water nor growth. Man cannot live there. Only frightening and unwanted kinds of animals dwell there.³³

Scripture is replete with tales of men being torn to pieces by lions and bitten by fiery serpents in the desert

³¹Mauser, p. 101.

³²Lane, p. 61.

³³Ibid.

places of Palestine.³⁴ In the wilderness, alone with the Spirit, demons and angels, Jesus faces the horror and vulnerability of being human in a hostile environment. But it is in precisely such a setting that obedience is tested and the soul of man purified. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered" (He. 5:8 KJV).

The fasting experience for Jesus was one of profound encounters with those forces of flesh and spirit that sought to compel him to act in disobedience to the Spirit's leading. Fasting puts him into temptation. It joins him with those in poverty and hunger, with those caught in mortal conflict with spiritual powers of destruction.

Through fasting in the desert, Jesus gained a heightened awareness of the forces of evil at work against him. He heard Satan speak. He faced ravenous beasts alone. Yet there, like Israel, he encountered a special nearness of YHWH's presence. Angels came as tangible tokens of the Father's benevolence.³⁵

Israel wandered in the wilderness forty years tempting God. Christ by contrast was tested for forty days and returned "in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14). A new

³⁴The wilderness and the beasts which lived there were a serious threat to life. The settling of Canaan was planned in such a manner that the land could be gradually subdued so as to exact a minimal toll of human life.

³⁵For the motif of encountering angels in the wilderness see Exod. 14:19; 23:20; 23; 32:34; 33:2.

Israel was born. Father Joseph Wimmer comments,

Jesus does not teach us how long to fast... but he does teach us how to fast, with what inner feeling and conviction. It is our means of being still before the divine presence, led by the Spirit into the desert... to wage with the forces of selfishness and pride, of Satan, and we must become spiritually strong, overcoming those temptation that would drive a wedge between us and our heavenly Father.³⁶

In fasting we encounter our spiritual nature and realize that, in truth, man does not live by bread alone.

Almsgiving, Prayer and Fasting

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is Matthew's longest and most thorough collection of Jesus' teachings. According to R. T. France, the "Sermon" makes no claim to be an ethic for society in general. Rather, "it deals with the character, duties, attitudes and dangers of the Christian disciple. It is a manifesto setting out the nature of life in the Kingdom of heaven."³⁷

In this manifesto Jesus confirms the place of fasting as a Christian discipline coupled with the attendant disciplines of prayer and almsgiving. Almsgiving, prayer and fasting have always been considered the three hallmarks

³⁶Wimmer, p. 44.

³⁷R.T. France, Matthew (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1985), p. 106.

of Jewish personal piety.³⁸ Far from dismissing them as incompatible with "the new wine" he brings, Jesus accepts them as central also to the spiritual development of his disciples. France notes,

The new attitude consists not in a repudiation of the main aspects of Jewish piety, but in an avoidance of ostentation in their performance. Religious observance is to be directed towards God, not to gaining the approval of men.³⁹

Jesus discusses the triad of almsgiving, prayer and fasting in three parallel passages (2-4, 5-6, 16-18) of equal length. Jesus draws a sharp contrast between the "piety" (a more apt translation of dikaiousunay in this context) of "the hypocrites" and that of faithful disciples. The hypocrites, "play actors,"⁴⁰ are meticulous in their observance of the three pillars: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. They carefully pay tithe, even on garden produce (Mt. 23:23), and regularly give to beggars. Daily they devote themselves to prayer. Twice weekly they mourn and fast.

Jesus does not question the propriety of the disciplines. They are helpful and necessary expressions of inner righteousness. His disciples too must care for the poor, pray and fast but "not as the hypocrites do."

³⁸W. D. Davies, The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount (London:Cambridge U. Press, 1963), pp. 307-315.

³⁹France, p. 130.

⁴⁰DNTT, V. 2, p. 468.

In their giving, the hypocrites "sound the trumpets" in the street and synagogue. Praying, they stand at the street corner. Fasting, they "disfigure" (aphanizousin, make invisible) their faces by smearing with ashes and dust. They moan and act gloomy (skuthropoi). For this public performance the "actors" receive pay (misthros): they are "seen of men" and consequently "glorified," "applauded" or "praised" of men. The Greek word chosen for "pay" (misthros) was well understood by Jesus' audience. Written across a receipt it meant "paid in full." Three times Jesus repeats, "Amen, I say to you, they have received their full pay" (6:2d; 6:5d; 6:16d).

By way of contrast, the disciple is directed to view the spiritual disciplines as a way of entering into intimate and secret contact with "your Father who is in secret" (6:6b; 6:8a). The disciples give alms discretely. They pray in the tameion, a private, windowless storeroom, perhaps the only lockable door in the house. If while fasting they must venture into the public, their appearance is normal (their face is washed), even happy (their head is anointed cp. Ps. 23). This motif of mystery and secrecy is anchored in an Old Testament understanding of the hiddenness of YHWH who can only be approached by the humble (Isaiah 57:15; Ps. 9:12) and heard by the quiet (I King 19:12). Jesus calls his disciples to return to the primitive roots of Jewish piety which held that spiritual

activity serves the primary function of sanctifying us that we might enter personally and intimately into the presence of YHWH (Ex. 19:10; 28:41ff).

As in the Torah, with the commandment comes a promise. If the disciples will obey his instructions and place themselves before God secretly, their "Father" (the title signifies a new order of God/man relationship) will "reward" them (apodosay). The selection of apodosay (reward) contrasts with misthos (wages) in verse 16. The word carries with it the idea that the huge reward given by God is out of all proportion to the act of obedience rendered. The quality of that reward is indicated by comparing the source of the reward (the Father) with that of the wage (men).⁴¹

Jesus' teaching on divine reward is distinct from Hebrew theology in several notable ways. First, examine the concept of gratuity. The disciple of Jesus is a bond-slave, not a hireling (Luke 17:7-10). As such, he has no right to claim a reward (misthos). If he should receive anything it would be an act of charis, a gift. The gift given in the parables of Jesus is not material; it is a more intimate and responsible union with the Master, the privilege of collaborating (Matt. 24:46f; Luke. 12:43f).

⁴¹Note that Pater sou (your Father) referring to YHWH as Father of anyone other than Jesus is found nowhere else in the N.T., only here (6:46; 6:6b,c; 6:18a,b). The only possible exception is Luke 15:27, a parable (Wimmer, p. 64).

Says Wimmer, "The faithful steward is put in charge of all the master's possessions; (cf. the parable of the talents, Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27)." ⁴²

Jesus' theology of reward distinctively de-emphasizes pay-off received in the here and now. By contrast, Old Testament thinking confined expectation of divine rewards and punishments to this life. Prosperity and catastrophe were seen as clear indicators of divine favor or wrath (cf. Job's comforters). Refusing to accept this view (see John 9:3 and Luke 13:1-5), Jesus focuses upon "the end of the age" as the supreme day of reward and punishment (Matt. 25:31, 32; Mark 8:38; Matt. 16:29). Until then, the disciple endures much opposition, even martyrdom (Mat.. 5:11; 10:28; 24:9), sharing in the sufferings of Jesus until his Kingdom is fully established. As they wait for that day, his disciples will continue to attend to the poor, to pray "Thy Kingdom come," and to fast humbly before the Father who sees in secret, waiting for the day when He rewards them lavishly and openly. "Even so, come quickly Lord Jesus."

The Question About Fasting

Some people came and asked Jesus, 'How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?'

(Mark 2:18 NIV)

⁴²Wimmer, p. 70. This and the next paragraph are largely a summation of his material, p. 70-71.

It was a fair question. Hadn't Jesus earlier included fasting as an important element of discipleship? Hadn't he demonstrated his personal embrace of fasting in the desert? In Luke's account the question is more emotive. "John the Baptist's disciples are constantly going without food and praying.... Why are your's wining and dining?" (Luke 5:33 LB).

Interesting though the question is, the answer is more so. Jesus does not deny the charge. In his answer he justifies the present non-fasting of his disciples and assures his critics of the eventual institution of the discipline by his followers in the days to come. Both positions derive from his eschatology of the Kingdom and of his role in it.

The "fast" in question is not that one prescribed for the Day of Atonement. Nor is it likely to be any of the four fasts mentioned by Zachariah (7:5; 8:19).⁴³ Most probably the questioners (the disciples of John, the Pharisees or "some of the people" depending upon whose account we read) are referring to the twice weekly fasts on Mondays and Thursdays practiced commonly by all pious Jews, the Pharisees and John's disciples especially.

⁴³Christ's general attitude toward the cultus would lead us to believe he kept the five general days of Jewish fasting. Gerhard Kittle, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, trans. by Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), V. 10, p. 931.

This, at least for John's disciples, was likely viewed as an act of repentance in anticipation of the salvation of Israel and the fiery judgment to come.

Not only did Jesus and his men refrain from fasting in sack cloth and ashes on these days, they typically ate and drank with such gusto as to merit the Pharisees' approbation, "He is a glutton and a drunkard" (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:39).

All three accounts record the fasting question as coming directly on the heels of a great feast thrown by Matthew to celebrate his ministerial calling. The crowd was made up entirely of the hated tax collectors and other "sinners" from the community.⁴⁴ Unconcerned about ceremonial defilement and less about loss of reputation, Jesus identified himself with them, and apparently served as the master of the feast (Mark 2:15), spending the evening in celebration and feasting. Perhaps it was such episodes that caused John to ask, "Are you the one...or do we look for another?" (Luke 7:19).

What John's disciples failed to understand was that Jesus was "the bridegroom." The salvation they sought and the Kingdom for which they fasted were present already in his person. As men witnessing the inauguration of the Kingdom, feasting in messianic joy was a more appropriate

⁴⁴See Lane, p. 103 for an explanation of the epithet "sinner."

behavior for his disciples than fasting. Jesus had come as the eschatological fulfillment of Joel and Isaiah's call for righteous fasting. To include those excluded as "sinners" (due to their inattendance to the code of the Pharisees) in the grace of table fellowship, was itself a proclamation that truly the Kingdom of Heaven had come. Fasting in such a time, even if it were possible, would be an insult to the movement of God and particularly to the bridegroom.

By the same token, Jesus recognized the scriptural prophecies that the Messiah would be "cut off" (Dan. 9:26) and "taken away" (Is. 53:8). Their rejoicing would not go undisturbed. The same eschatological hope that brought them the bridegroom, joy and feasting would later lead them to fast (Mark 2:20 and plls.)

The question allows Jesus to raise an even more important issue, that of the relationship between His "Kingdom movement" and ceremonial Judaism as a whole. Following his usual rabbinic style, he makes his argument through rhetorical questions and allegory. Would an intelligent person use valuable new cloth to patch up a tattered garment? Is it wise to put precious, still-fermenting new wine into stretched and worn wineskins? The answer to both is, of course not.

Though similar and related in many ways, the Kingdom and ritualistic Judaism were incompatible. To attempt to

bind the Kingdom message to the weakness and insufficiency of Judaism could only cause a schism (the actual Greek word used). The hold of the Scribes, Pharisees and teachers of the Law upon the religious life and theology of Israelite religion had caused the wineskin to become stiff, rigid and inflexible. To add fresh wine to such a rotting structure would ultimately destroy the old wineskin, and worse, spill the new wine.

In this teaching Jesus foreshadows Paul's more detailed teaching that the Law was provisional and preparatory (Gal. 4:1-2). Old and worn, it has served its purpose of bringing mankind to the knowledge of Christ and has now been superceded by the person of Jesus (Gal. 4:4-11). The Law, a means to an end, had been elevated as an end in itself by the Pharisees..

Fasting too could become an idolatrous preoccupation. Jesus realizes this and puts the discipline in proper perspective. Like the Law it is provisional and preparatory, something useful only in a time of messianic waiting. It is incompatible with the joy of the bridegroom's presence and with the atmosphere of a realized Kingdom of Heaven.

Christ's answer to the question on fasting leaves us with the knowledge that Christian fasting is distinct from Jewish fasting. We do not fast in mourning and repentance, preparing to face the judgment. We have already been

judged and declared innocent by the blood of Jesus. Soteriologically then, Christian fasting is different. Different too, is the eschatological basis of Christian fasting. Our messiah has come already. We have accepted his rule and have become citizens of his Kingdom. We fast in expectation and longing for it; "Thy Kingdom come." The heartbeat of Christian fasting is the prayer, "Come quickly Lord Jesus." The person of Jesus and His act in our history has caused everything we do, including fasting to be Cristocentric. Says Wimmer,

This Christian fast [is] something new, distinct from that of Judaism, not only as regards the day of fasting, but more importantly, in terms of its inner motivation. Even as a sign of humble worship of the Father it was henceforth related to Jesus through whom our salvation has come, and in whose presence we will one day rejoice without reservation in the plentitude of his Kingdom.⁴⁵

Fasting and Exorcism (Mark 9:29; Matt. 17:21)

The most controversial saying attributed to Jesus regarding fasting is found in Mark 9:29 and the parallel in Matt. 17:21 (KJV). Returning from the transfiguration, Jesus spies a mob harassing his disciples. They have failed in their attempt to exorcise a demon from an epileptic boy (though they had been successful at other times, cf. Luke 10:17). Jesus dispatches the particularly violent demon with a word. The disciples later question

⁴⁵Wimmer, p. 107.

him privately about their failure, "Why weren't we able (dunamai i.e., powerful enough) to cast it out?" (Mark 2:28). Jesus' reply in Mark's Gospel is simply, "This kind (genos) cannot be made to come out except by prayer and fasting" (en oudeni dunatai exelthein ei may en proseuxay [kai nesteia] v. 29 U.B.S. text, translation mine).

The controversy regarding this passage arises at two points. The first is that it makes fasting a precondition for certain types of exorcism. Modern theological rationalism rejects a priori the supernatural world altogether. Passages like this are an embarrassing reminder of the superstitious age into which the infant church was imbedded. It follows then, that any text attributed to Jesus by the early church that gives instruction on the ministry of exorcism, etc., must be a redaction by a third or fourth century scribe.⁴⁶ The optimistic theologies of the last century and early 20th Century tend also to downplay any notion of a continuing struggle between spiritual powers, insisting that the battle has been won. For these theologians the war is over. The enemy surrendered at Calvary. We needn't concern ourselves then with scriptural references to demonic activity.

The second point of controversy is allegedly textual, and arises from the first. There has been a tendency in

⁴⁶So Wimmer. p. 77.

scholasticism since the enlightenment to soften any hints of asceticism in Scripture. Consequently nearly every mention of fasting in the New Testament has been purged from modern English and Greek texts. Scholars have reason to question the inclusion of nesteia (fasting) in the text of Acts 10:30 and perhaps 1 Cor. 7:5.. Even in those instances, however, the supporting witnesses are of early origin. Omitting it from Mark 9 is another matter.

The argument against the fasting texts generally follows this line of reasoning:

The expressions in Acts "worshipping the Lord and fasting" (13:2), fasting and praying" (13:3). "prayer and fasting" (14:23), together with the relationship between prayer and fasting in Matt. 6, doubtlessly paved the way for the entrance of the glosses into the text of the Bible."⁴⁷

Scholars like Wimmer would remove the word "fasting" from Matt. 17:21; Mark 9:29; Acts 10:30 and I Cor. 7:5.

This view is by no means universal. As early as 1934, P. L. Couchard was arguing that kai nesteia (and fasting) was the original reading of at least Mark 9:29. "Quoting Strack-Billerbeck I, 760, he pointed out that fasting normally accompanied the exorcism of demons."⁴⁸ Even Kurt Aland, who omitted "fasting" from the U.B.S. text admits that kai nestia was probably a part of the torn Chester Beatty Papyrus "P46" (Circa 200), one of the earliest

⁴⁷Wimmer, p. 77.

⁴⁸Wimmer, p. 78

accounts of Mark's Gospel.⁴⁹

In his commentary on Mark's Gospel, R. Alan Cole addresses the question of kai nesteia in 9:29 by saying, "There is good MS evidence for the addition of and fasting."⁵⁰ He rejects Cranfield's counter-opinion as a priori and cites Lightfoot and Didache VIII as further evidence for accepting the words as original.

French L. Arrington, a noted New Testament scholar, expressed this view when addressed in personal correspondence on the issue. "I think you are right in your observation that there is strong MS evidence for the reading nesteia in Mark 9:29...An anti-ascetic sentiment could have some influence on textual scholarship."⁵¹

Regardless of which side of this debate one is on, that the concept formed part of an early Christian theology of exorcism is hardly debatable. Wimmer views it as a gloss but admits,

The addition of "fasting" to "prayer" in all the above texts shows the great emphasis

⁴⁹Kurt Aland, et. al. eds. The Greek New Testament (Munster, West Germany: U.B.S., 1966). textual apparatus p. 159. It is difficult to understand how the editors could give an "A" degree of certainty for the reading proseuche when it is attested by five witnesses versus nearly sixty for proseuche kai nesteia including P. 46, Codex Sinaiticus, Basil and the Diatessaron of Tatian (C. 100's A.D.).

⁵⁰Cole, p. 148.

⁵¹French L. Arrington, Professor of New Testament Exegesis, Church of God School of Theology, in a personal correspondence dated April 6, 1988.

placed by the Church on fasting as a means of strengthening prayer. It is something it learned from the Old Testament (Ezra 8:21-23; Neh. 1:4; 9:1ff; Esth. 4:16; 2 Mac 13:12; Sir. 34:26), maintained during its early formation (Acts 13:2f; 14:23), and continued to stress....The glosses themselves attest to the validity of the concept.⁵² (Wimmer, p. 78)

Exorcism in the primitive church was practiced as part of the baptismal rites on the ground that everyone was in bondage to Satan previous to conversion/baptism. It was necessary to be formally released from the evil spirit and made to receive the Spirit of God.⁵³ The priest therefore was instructed to breathe thrice upon the face of the subject...and to say, "Depart from him foul spirit, and give place to the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete."⁵⁴

As in Jewish exorcism, fasting was seen as a prerequisite for successfully expelling demons and other hindering spirits. That such a fast was firmly in practice as early as the second century is evident by Did. 7:4, "You shall order the one to be baptized to fast one or two days before." Regardless of modern opinion, the early church clearly accepted the notion, believed spoken by

⁵²Wimmer, p. 78. Wimmer's is the only scholarly book in print specifically armed at exegeting every significant fasting text in the Gospels. His work makes an important contribution to a relatively neglected area of study.

⁵³Patrick Fairbairn, Imperial Study Bible Encyclopaedia (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), V. 2, p. 265.

⁵⁴Fairbairn, V. 2, p. 265. See also The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality, ed. by Gordon S. Wakefield (Phil: Westminster, 1983), p. 140.

Jesus, that fasting adds strength for a struggle against the demonic.

Early Christian Practice

As prophesied in Mark 2:20, the removal of Jesus' physical presence established a practice of fasting in the life of the church. By 65 A.D. it seems to have been routine for a congregation to seek the mind of the Lord through a season of prayer and fasting before making any major decisions. In Acts 13 the church at Antioch is in such a season as they receive command to ordain Barnabus and Saul for missionary service. Before sending them into hostile territory, however; the church enters into another period of fasting. This was apparently a time of spiritual warfare against the "principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12) the missionaries would encounter.

Paul and Fasting

The Apostle Paul is associated with fasting more than any early leader. When confronted by Jesus on the road to Damascus, his immediate response is to enter into a three day fast (Acts 9:9). He receives his calling during a fast. He is ordained and commissioned after a fast. As Acts

14:23 shows, he and Barnabus made a practice of fasting and praying with the leaders of newly established churches.

"And when they had ordained elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord on whom they believed" (Acts 14:23).

Every key epistolary passage concerning fasting is attributed to Paul. In Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8, Paul establishes a theology of abstention for the sake of the weaker brother. In I Corinthians 7, he limits periods of abstention in the context of marriage. In 2 Corinthians 6:5 he establishes fasting as an ingredient in the apostolic ministry and in 11:27 he lists fasting in his catalogue of sufferings. In the face of the extreme pagan fasting practices of the first century Paul's ascetic theology is remarkably balanced and original. "Contrary to the mystery cults of the day, Paul 'keeps under his body,' not to induce mystical experiences or to become released from his material nature but to prevent "falling into sin."⁵⁵

Other than Paul's references, there is little instruction concerning fasting in the epistolary section of the New Testament Canon. This has led some like F.S. Rothenberg to conjecture that although there was fasting in Jewish first century churches (Acts 13:3) "it does not seem

⁵⁵Michael Cox, A Handbook of Christian Spirituality (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), p. 47.

to have existed at all" in Gentile churches. "We may thus conclude that the idea that fasting has a value in its own right was abandoned, but that the primitive Christian church in Palestine...retained the practice...to demonstrate that their prayers were earnest."⁵⁶

At best this is an argument from silence. A more likely view is expressed by Wimmer, "The New Testament does not intend to present a complete and detailed doctrine about fasting; it presupposes that of the Hebrew Scriptures and makes only such changes as are directly related to the person of Jesus and his mission."⁵⁷ Clearly the example of Paul and the Apostles, if not their teaching, figured significantly in establishing fasting as a distinct Christian practice from the inception of the church.

Conclusion

The fasting practice of Judaism was embraced by the Christian community from its nascence. The foundation for the Christian theology of fasting lay in the Old Testament understanding of fast as a means of purification and preparation for a direct encounter with YHWH. The teaching and example of Jesus linked with Isaiah 58 and Joel 2 incorporating an eschatological emphasis. Paul listed

⁵⁶F. S. Rothenberg, DNTT, V. 1, p. 613.

⁵⁷Wimmer, p. 120.

fasting as an indispensable element of apostolic ministry. Fasting continued to be practiced and emphasized in the Post-Apostolic Christian community as well. The next chapter outlines the development of fasting through 2000 years of church history.

CHAPTER 3

Fasting as a Tradition of the Church

Introduction

In tracing the practice of fasting as the tradition of the church, we will encounter the familiar cycle we saw within Judaism. The fasting practice that begins as an expression of heartfelt and earnest humility falls, this time, into the hands of "Christian Pharisees."

As fasting becomes the rule of the church, spontaneity is abolished. The Spirit and mystery of a personal encounter with the Father fades into the background. The wineskin hardens. In the wake of the loss of meaningful religion, revival movements arise in eschatological fervor, first the Reformation, then Methodism and finally Pentecostalism. Each desires to return to the roots of primitive Christianity. With each successive revival of the church comes a renewed emphasis upon personal devotion and the practices of alms, prayer and fasting.

In a sense, the church's approach toward such discipline serves as a barometer of her spiritual vitality and health. A formalized, harsh and regulated attitude toward the disciplines generally indicates a period when the flames of spiritual grace and anointing are flickering low. In times when the church experiences a fresh

outpouring of the new wine, legislation becomes superfluous and is superceded by the voluntary devotion of the people of God.

The Psalmist exhorted, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!" (Ps. 34:8 KJV). When men and women are, by grace, permitted a taste of the divine presence, they seem naturally to renew their interest in personal holiness.

A nineteenth-century camp meeting song expressed it like this:

Nothing between my soul and the Savior
so that his blessed face may be seen,
Nothing preventing the least of his favors,
keep the way clear, let nothing between.

(Church Hymnal, Cleveland, TN)

The voluntary embrace of disciplines such as fasting has, throughout the history of the church, expressed a sincere desire to "let nothing between."

THE EARLY CHURCH

As previously noted, didactic material on fasting in the New Testament is sparse. Perhaps the practice was so well understood that it merited no comment. By the time of the Didache (C. 90 A.D.), church leaders saw instruction in fasting as necessary. New converts were encouraged to fast twice weekly in expectation of the Lord's return. Wednesdays and Fridays were selected as suitable days. This was to separate the Christian practice of fasting from

that of the Jews. By the second century, the Paschal Fast was established, requiring fasting during the time Jesus was in the tomb (see Irenaeus in Eusebius, Hist. eccl. V. 24, 12ff). Soon there were a number of regular fasts. A pre-baptismal fast was required of both baptizer and novitiates (Didache 7:4, Tertulian, On Baptism, 20). This expanded to a pre-communion fast by the time of Tertulian's De Oratione.¹

Tertulian developed the theology, even before his Montanist days, that fasting was meritorious. He called it "a sacrament that reconciles to God" (De Patientia, 13). Tertulian taught that Old Testament Scripture pointed to four spiritual uses for fasting: "The change of nature . . . a version of perils . . . obliteration of sins and the recognition of mysteries" (On Fasting, 7; circa A.D. 208). The teaching of Jesus, according to him, yielded an even deeper truth,

He [Jesus] taught likewise that fasts
are to be the weapons for battling with
the more direful demons (On Fasting, 8).

For Tertulian, the discipline was a spiritual aid in both expelling "iniquitous spirits" and in preparing the way for "the Holy Spirit's ingress" (On Fasting, 8). He points to the experience of Cornelius as evidence that fasting prepares the soul to receive "the honorable gift of the

¹For more detail see Gerhard Kittel, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, trans. by Geoffrey Bromiley, (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1967), V. 10, p. 933f.

Holy Spirit" (On Fasting, 8).

Throughout his comments, Tertulian's focus remains on fasting as a means of experiencing a closer fellowship and communion with the presence of God. Recounting the end of Elijah's forty day fasting journey he writes,

When he had made a cave his inn, with
how familiar a meeting with God was he
received! "What doest thou Elijah, here?"
Much more friendly was this voice than
"Adam, where art thou?" For the latter voice
was uttering a threat to a fed man, the
former soothing a fasting one.

(On Fasting, 6)

Other early Christian leaders like Justin, Polycarp, Pseudo Barnabus and Hermas sounded similar notes, urging their readers to pursue a regular discipline of fasting. By the fourth century, a time of persecution, the forty day Lenten fast was established as an analogy to Christ's forty day fast against his demonic enemies in the desert.²

Greek Asceticism

With the rise of Greek dualistic theology came the establishment of asceticism within Christianity. Greek asceticism had an honorable foundation despite its later abuses. The Greek word, askeisis (exercise, practice), originally spoke of training to attain something worth aspiring to, and ideal. Its first association was with

²Westminster Dictionary,, p. 148.

strenuous training toward the ideal of bodily excellence, being fit in the highest degree (Plato, Rep. 403E). with the development of philosophy came the idea of "training" the mind. Later the Sophists linked the two fields of training. The objective was "a good mind in a sound body."

This concept later expanded into the arena of ethics. The new ideal was that of a perfect (note change of emphasis) human: body and soul (spirit). This perfection could only be reached by a comprehensive self-preparation toward a life of virtuous, selfless conduct in society.

Epictetus declared that the object of askeisis was "the freedom of the sage who acts without hindrance in choice and in refusal" (Dissertationes, "Peri Askeisis," 3.12). Sadly such a balanced view was soon overwhelmed by Cynic-Stoic dualistic philosophy which narrowed askeisis and stated its goal negatively: "the detachment of the spirit from comforts and enticements of the world." This view promoted radical suppression of the appetites and a welcoming of hardship and pain.³

The next centuries would witness the profound struggle of the infant Church for an authentic Christian asceticism. Many paths would be attempted. Each new way would have its champion.

³NCE, V. 1, p. 939 for a more complete analysis.

Christian Asceticism

The first of these champions was St. Anthony (251-356). His biography, The Life of Anthony, by Athanasius, lighted a spark in the hearts of many persecuted and disenchanted young Christians. He became the father of the monastic movement. Many followed Anthony into the desert establishing settlements throughout the Nile valley. John Cassian and Palladius spent years travelling through the region gathering firsthand information on these champions of the desert way. From their records and those of others through the centuries we can isolate four types of Christian asceticism.⁴

Christian asceticism presupposes a permanent connectedness of the body and the soul. The four emerging models of thought seek to address this connectedness. Each proposes a different goal for ascetical practices such as fasting.

The first model saw self knowledge as the goal. Palladius describes the motivation of the early hermits thus: "They wished to lay hold upon their souls." For one school of the desert fathers "laying hold" involved turning one's focus inward, purifying the soul of its mass of hidden sin until the image of God within shone clearly

⁴The following section is largely a summary of chapter six, Margaret Miles, Fullness of Life (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), pp.135-153.

through. This was to be accomplished through an interaction of:

1. Solitude.
2. Submission to a spiritual mentor who acted as a guide on the journey inward.
3. "Naming the demons" one encountered along the way; resisting their hold on one's life.
4. Self-denial through ascetic practices such as fasting.

The discipline of the body (e.g. fasting) was not applied as to an enemy. It was specifically focused to address areas of distraction and demonic influence discovered through prolonged introspection. The body was seen as the gateway to the soul. Thus, any discipline learned by the body was also gained by the soul.⁵ Fasting was practiced with great vigor, yet John Cassian warned of an ascetic who, "being deceived by the devil," went on a two day fast which produced only "useless fatigue of body, and worse, a fatigue which would harm the spirit."⁶ Though the disciplines were powerful tools for self-revelation, Cassian resisted the temptation to exalt them as ends in themselves.

The second path rose as the individualism of the desert hermits gave way to communal piety, cenobitic monasticism. The eremitical quest of Anthony's day had

⁵Miles, p. 139.

⁶Cassian in Miles, p. 141.

deteriorated into a subtle idolatry of self. Basil established a new rule for anchorites based upon the premise that the enemy of the soul consisted of three powerful instincts: sex, power and possession. These instincts, he claimed, were best addressed in monastic communities. The communal life would add balance to one's journey toward perfection and lessen the power of anger, gloom, pride, and impatience.

The sex instinct was subdued through a lifelong commitment of celibacy lived within the confines of the monastery. The instincts of power and possession were overcome through a total renunciation of self-interest. The disciple melded his life into that of the monastic order, completely abandoning all rights to personal property and individuality.

Because the desire to outshine each other in feats of self-denial had created competition and rivalry among the desert hermits, Basil did not stress disciplines such as fasting. In their place he encouraged silence and withdrawal from the world.

The third historical model was that of Augustine. He saw the soul as a reservoir of spiritual energy. This energy is constantly expended on the soul's loving maintenance of its dying "bride," the body. If unchecked, the soul will exhaust itself completely, causing both body and soul to perish. To avoid this ultimate tragedy, one

must at times suspend the flow of spiritual energy to the body. To accomplish this, Augustine recommended only celibacy and fasting.⁷ He believed that voluntary physical denial would create spiritual hunger. With the demands of the body suspended, the soul's attention could become focused on its own repair and replenishment. The soul's capacity for the life of God would become deeper. This would ultimately benefit the needy body as well. The body's connectedness with the soul, in this model, is a manageable condition in the formation process.

The fourth model was that of Ignatius of Loyola. Recuperating from a leg wound in 1521, he read Ludolf of Saxony's Life of Christ. Convicted of his need to reform, Ignatius set out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In route, he stopped at Manresa for ten months to prepare spiritually. There he developed a carefully organized program of severe asceticism and focused meditation on the life of Christ. The Spiritual Exercises became the basis for the spirituality of the Jesuit priesthood. Ignatius' spiritual model was pragmatic and to the point. Why waste precious time developing one's being? For Ignatius, doing the work of a missionary was the important thing. The problem with man was laziness and an inordinate concern for the body. Ignatius' plan dealt with that problem forcefully through severe self-mortification. Disciples

⁷See his treatise on "The Usefulness of Fasting."

suffered extreme lack of sleep and nourishment. To this, physical torture was added, inducing psychic horrors as a way of taking one's own punishment for sin. These penances were meant to emphasize the horrible nature of sin and the supreme sacrifice in the passion of Jesus Christ. The entire program lasted only one month allowing the would-be Jesuit to quickly focus his attention on the pagans in need of such conversion.

Ignatius' "body as the problem" approach established a regrettable tradition of self-mutilation as a way of securing the favor of God. One extreme medieval sect -- the Catharists, practiced suicide by starvation. They called the fasting practice the endura and received the consolamentum (a ritual baptism) just as they crossed from life to death.⁸

THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH

Such rigorous monastic fasting did not immediately influence the fasting practice of the church at large. In time, however, monastic ideals affected the practice and theology of every believer. The mandatory observance of the Lenten fasting period is one good example.

⁸Rogers, p. 43.

Lent

In the first three centuries we noted the voluntary practice of fasting in preparation for Easter Sunday. Irenaeus of Lyons tells us that in consecration, most Christians fasted for 24 to 48 hours. By the third century the Roman churches were fasting two days. About this time St. Anthony's heroic fasting became legendary and challenged the Church to greater sacrifice. In 360 A.D. the Council of Laodicea commanded a forty day period for all believers. By the fifth century the Lenten fast was being strictly observed throughout Christendom. One meal per day was allowed (late evening after vespers). Meat and dairy products were forbidden for the entire season. By the ninth century the regulations were somewhat relaxed. In the thirteenth century the evening meal might be eaten as early as noon with a light "collation" (bread and wine) in the evening.⁹

We must not assume that such relaxation indicated a disinterest in fasting. Every Friday continued to be observed in fasting. To this were added many "special" days of fasting. Soon every festal season was preceded by a fast. Thus, the Church came to have a "Vigil of Christmas," a "Vigil of Epiphany," and a "Vigil of Pentecost." Four seasonal fasts, "Ember Days," were added

⁹NCE, V. 8, p. 635.

in imitation of the four Jewish fasts.¹⁰

With the development of a theology of penance, fasting came into even greater usage as a sacrament of purgation. The reconciliation of a penitent sinner took up to two years. During this period the sinner was expected to keep private fast days in addition to those of the Church. In time, extended periods of voluntary fasting came to be the hallmark of pietism.

Heroic Fasting

Nicholas of Flue earned sainthood through his regimen of fasting. In 1467, at 58 years of age, he left his family to embrace the life of a hermit in the Alps. For the remaining nineteen and one half years of his life, tradition claims, "he abstained completely from food."¹¹

Joseph of Copertino (1600's) earned the same distinction by eating nothing but herbs covered in a powder so bitter that a brother tasting it was sick for weeks. Lidune of Scheidan lived 33 years on a swallow of water or beer and a slice of apple the size of a communion wafer. Margaret Weiss, a ten-year-old, amazed her community in 1539 with a three year fast.

The fasting craze then swept into Germany where, in

¹⁰Rogers, p. 43.

¹¹"St. Nicholas of Flue," NCE, V. 10, p. 452-3.

1575, a child named Eve Fliegen was enduring much hunger through the poverty of her family. She prayed that God would remove her hunger. Said her biographer:

Such compassion tooke the Almighty of her miseries that in the yeare 1594 her desire for feeding, which in former times she had, grew to be faint and very small, insomuch that every two, three and four daies, she tooke little sustenance or none at all.¹²

After three years of this partial fasting she gave up eating altogether until her death fourteen years later. Her pastor watched her prior to her death for fourteen days, leaving convinced that her fast was genuine.¹³

We can discern four purposes behind most medieval Christian fasting.

1. Fasting to practice self-control (this intended to reduce selfish impulses).
2. Fasting to purify oneself from sin.
3. Fasting to atone for one's sin.
4. Superstitious fasting (the medieval monks, like the ancient Celts often "fasted against" persons viewed as enemies in an attempt to

¹²See Rogers, p. 9f for more information on these legendary fasters.

¹³Legends such as these are quite popular in Roman Catholicism. Though many of the more "incredible" fasters were later discredited, their mystique inspired imitators even in modern times. In 1918, Therese Neumann, a tailor's daughter, began to fast after a near-fatal fire left her temporarily paralyzed out of fear. She recovered, and soon began to experience a stigmata on her palms, reminiscent of the crucified Jesus. For the next 30 years she claimed to live on 1/8 of a communion wafer per day. As late as 1950 devout Catholics made pilgrimages to her. (Rogers, p. 10).

bring evil upon them).¹⁴

A common abuse in the face of such rigor was the selling of dispensations originally reserved for the sick, pregnant or those travelling. Such corruption evidenced the loss of meaningful faith and triggered the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century.

REFORMATION FASTING

In 1522, five years after Luther's 95 theses, Zurich authorities banned the Lenten fast (an early step toward Calvinistic reform).¹⁵ Luther himself felt that the Catholic Church's demand for self-mortification led Christians to conclude they could justify sin and immorality by fasting afterward. He did, however, encourage the continued practice of personal fasting as a means of keeping down the sexual and wanton desires of the body.¹⁶

The widespread destruction of monasteries by Protestants had the unexpected effect of nearly destroying the fishing industries of England and Protestant Europe. In their continual practice of fasting and abstinence, most

¹⁴Rogers, p. 46

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

monastic communities had subsisted entirely upon fish and vegetables. Queen Elizabeth I of England rescued the industry by proclaiming "meatless days" and by encouraging all of her subjects to buy more fish.¹⁷

The Church of England encouraged the observance of important fasting days. Such days were included in the Book of Common Prayer, but without the specific regulations of the Roman Catholic past. The manner and mode of observing such days were left to the discretion of the individual layman, rector and bishop.

George Fox, founder of Quakerism in the 1600's, taught against public fasting. He preferred private fasting, which he claimed, was a help in times of confusion or trouble. In light of the "fasting children" fad of his day (many leading to the child's death), he preferred to emphasize simplicity of diet.¹⁸

POST-REFORMATION FASTING

Cotton Mather, in his Manuduction ad Ministerium (1728), reveals that as part of his pastoral duty he made a list of all his parishioners. He systematically went over the list, interceding for each member by name. He often set aside a day of fasting and prayer for a particular

¹⁷Rogers, p. 47.

¹⁸Book of Common Prayer and Fox in Rogers, p. 47.

member.

William Law had strong opinions about the place of fasting in the church. "No Christian who knows anything of the gospel can doubt whether fasting be a common duty of Christianity since our Lord has placed it along with secret alms and private prayer" (Matt. 6:17-18).¹⁹ Law adds, "The reason for self denial and abstinence is constant because we are perpetually united to a body that must be directed into actions consonant with a holy life."²⁰

No post-reformation leader was more energetic at fasting than John Wesley. His Oxford "Holy Club" fasted, according to the early church pattern, every Wednesday and Friday. He later experimented with different forms of abstinence. For a time he gave up meat and wine. Later, he restricted himself to two meals per day. While in Georgia (1735-1738) he experimented with a bread-only diet, then switched to vegetarianism and later gave up tea.²¹ Throughout his career he preached the duty of Christian fasting.

Wesley's fasting was often communal. His journal entry of April 14, 1738 reads:

I explained at large the nature and manner
of entering into covenant with God and desired

¹⁹William Law, Christian Perfection pub. in 1726, reprinted in Epiphany Journal (Spr. 1985), p. 46ff.

²⁰Law, p. 47.

²¹Rogers, P. 47.

all who purposed to do so, to set Friday apart for solemn fasting and prayer. Many did so, and met at both five in the morning at noon and in the morning at noon and in the evening.²²

Before ordaining any man as a preacher he would ask:

Do you use as much abstinence in fasting every week as your health, strength and labor will permit? Will you recommend fasting or abstinence both by precept and example?²³

FASTING IN AMERICAN HISTORY

Public fasting played a noteworthy role in the shaping of America for nearly two centuries. Pilgrims fasted in Leyden prior to their perilous Atlantic crossing. Their theology of fasting centered around the theme of humility: fasting humbles the (naturally proud) soul; God loves the humble and rewards them with a clear understanding of his will and purpose; those who do the will of God are abundantly blessed and helped by the Lord.

The summer drought of 1623 imperilled the vital corn crop. Without the corn, winter would bring starvation to the Plymouth Colony. A public fast was called. By evening, "sweet and gentle showers" soaked the parched earth, reviving the thirsty crop. A law allowing the governor and his assistants to command days of fasting or

²²John Wesley, The Journal of John Wesley reprinted in Alexander James Reid Our Biblical and Wesleyan Heritage Through Fasting and Prayer (n.p: n.d.)

²³Poole, p. 17.

thanksgiving was passed on November 15, 1636.²⁴

On June 1, 1774, the House of Burgesses of Virginia Colony called for a public fast, fearing a British invasion. George Washington entered in his diary, "Went to church and fasted all day." The invasion was averted. John Adams and James Madison called for national fast days during their presidencies when confronted with similar situations.

Abraham Lincoln called three different fasts in response to requests by both houses of government. His fast of 1861 addressed "heads of families." Apparently, he envisioned prayer and fasting being carried out in American homes as well as in the churches. An excerpt from the proclamation of April 30, 1863 reads:

It is the duty of nations as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assurance that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.²⁵

Fasting in Roman Catholicism

The last 200 years has seen a gradual cooling in Roman

²⁴Derek Prince, Shaping History through Prayer and Fasting (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1973), pp. 127-137.

²⁵Prince, p. 5-6.

Catholic lay fasting. First came a formalizing of the practice into two categories: fasting and abstinence. Fasting came to mean "cutting down on food." Abstinence meant eating no meat. On fasting days one might eat two meals of one-fourth the regular size, and a normal dinner. On days of abstinence, one might eat as much of anything as one liked, except for meat or gravy. In 1957 the Eucharistic Fast was reduced from one day to three hours, and again later to one hour. The Vatican II proclamations of the 1960's brought about the total abolition of all fasting and abstinence laws. Meat is now acceptable on all Fridays except in Lent when fish is to be substituted. Lenten fasting has been reduced to two days, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, when fasting is "desirable" but not mandatory.²⁶

Fasting in Greek Orthodoxy

The greatest advocate of fasting has, for centuries, been the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Greek Orthodoxy has 226 regular fast days. In addition, Christians are encouraged to private fasting as a means of "mortifying" the flesh to benefit the soul. This mortificare symbolizes the death of all personal or selfish goals.²⁷ In their

²⁶Rogers, p. 45-6.

²⁷Rogers, p. 42.

place, the fasting ones embrace the coming Kingdom of Christ.

The Greek Orthodox liturgy is called the Triodion. Father Kallistos Ware explains that the Triodion emphasizes the unity of body and soul and affirms the positive role of the body in spiritual formation (I Cor. 6:19-20). The tiredness of the fasting body contributes to the soul's attitude of contrition. With body and soul yearning after God, the believer is made conscious of dependence upon God and affirms the word of Jesus, "Without me ye can do nothing." According to Fr. Ware, fasting is not an end, but a preparation for "decisive action or for a direct encounter with God."²⁸ Thus, fasting "enables us to draw near to the mountain of prayer."²⁹

It is precisely this desire to draw near to God's mountain for a direct encounter that has kept alive the fasting tradition within Christianity. Legislation, by the very nature of the act (however well intentioned) crushes the spiritual heartbeat of fasting. As evidence, read slowly the following excerpt from Roman Catholic fasting policy,

. . . Nondigestible matter, such as paper, fingernails, or tobacco, does not break the fast. Any digestible thing in a solid state when taken orally is considered food, even if

²⁸Kallistos Ware, "The Meaning of the Great Fast," Epiphany Journal (Spring, 1985), pp. 40-43.

²⁹Ware, loc. cit.

it liquefies in the mouth before being swallowed, e.g., a caramel. Ordinary chewing gum probably does not break the fast; nor is it broken by what comes from within the mouth, e.g., blood from the gums or food remaining in the teeth from a previous meal. The fast is not broken by what is taken into the stomach along with saliva, nor by what is taken along with breathing, e.g., insects blown into the mouth....³⁰

That the fasting tradition even continues today, despite centuries of abuse by those inclined to impose "piety under duress," is evidence itself of the peculiar power of fasting in spiritual formation. From ancient times men and women have been willing to undergo any discomfort necessary for the joy of experiencing a direct encounter with God. Out of his experiences with the holy, David exults, "In thy presence is fullness of joy" (Ps. 16:11).

The centuries have not exhausted the holy craving to experience the glory of God up close. The Pentecostal churches berthed out of the Wesleyan-holiness tradition, uniquely embody the "passion for the presence" that has informed Christian fasting throughout the ages. Outside of liturgical traditions such as the Greek Orthodox theirs is arguably the most consistent practice of fasting in Christianity today. By understanding their fasting and the theology behind it, perhaps we can see what aspects of ancient fasting tradition remain meaningful and

³⁰NCE V. 8, p. 635.

authoritative today.

Fasting in Pentecostalism with special reference to the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee.

The Pentecostal tradition is comparatively young. The Church of God (Cleveland, TN; 1.6 million members worldwide) claims to be the oldest continuing Pentecostal church in America. Such a distinction dates back only one hundred years (1886), and is the offspring of Methodism and of the nineteenth-century holiness revival.³¹

Donald Dayton in his Theological Roots of Pentecostalism argues alongside Vinson Synan, Melvin E. Dieter and Donald Wheelock for the Wesleyan origins of Pentecostalism.³² He cites three areas of John Wesley's theology which may have contributed to the rise of the nineteenth century Holiness Movement and ultimately to the birth of Pentecostalism: the "primitivistic" motif in

³¹See Charles W. Conn Like A Mighty Army (Cleveland, TN; Pathway Publishing Co., 1977) for a complete history of the Church of God. See also Donald W. Dayton Theological Roots of Pentecostalism (Grand Rapids: Frances Asbury Press, 1987) for the most current study on the connection between Wesleyanism and Pentecostalism.

³²Vinson Synan The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971, Melvin E. Dieter, The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century, (London: Scarecrow Press, 1980), Donald Wheelock, "Spirit Baptism in Am. Pent. Thought," Ph.d. dissertation, Emory University, 1983. William M. Menzies, Anointed to Serve, (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971) argues against Wesleyan roots of the Movement.

Wesley (i.e., his advocacy of a return to "true, primitive Christianity"),³³ whether he may be called a theologian of the Holy Spirit," and his understanding of the gifts of the Spirit.³⁴

Pentecostalism, according to Steven J. Land, was "born in the fires of millennial expectation in the late nineteenth century."³⁵ His thumbnail sketch of the history of the Movement provides a concise picture of the important events of those early years.

Previous pentecostal-like revivals, with attendant tongues-speech occurred throughout the 1800's in several places including England (the Irvingites), Germany, Wales, India, Russia (Armenians, who later showed up in Los Angeles at the Azusa Street Revival), during several holiness revivals (Finney, Moody, etc.) and finally in Topeka, Kansas (1901) and Los Angeles, California (1906-1909). The last two occurrences are especially significant, since it was from the Bible school of Charles Fox Parham in Topeka, Kansas that the teaching of baptism in the Holy Spirit, evidence by speaking in tongues was said to have originated. If Topeka added this spark of insight, the flame of the twentieth-century revival was kindled and spread through the Azusa Street Mission revival and a humble, one-eyed, black holiness preacher, William J. Seymour (Topeka and Azusa represent the interracial tensions and origins of the movement in North America). People came from all over the country and went out to the world to spread the news of

³³"A Letter to a Roman Catholic" (1749), Sect. 15.

³⁴Dayton, p. 40.

³⁵Steven J. Land unpublished article "Pentecostal Spirituality: Living in the Spirit." Land is a professor at the Church of God School of Theology, (Cleveland, TN).

this great "latter days" outpouring of the Spirit.³⁶

Pentecostal Church historian David Thompson sees a line of continuity extending from Macarius the Egyptian to John Wesley to the Pentecostal movement.³⁷ Macarius is a little remembered Christian monastic whose Fifty Spiritual Homilies were translated into English and published by Thomas Haywood in 1721 under the title Primitive Morality. William Law admired it greatly and commended it to his friend Byrom in 1737.³⁸

John Wesley was tremendously impacted by the work and said, "His acquaintance with the Sacred writings was not merely literal or speculative, but...a true and practical knowledge, able to save his soul."³⁹ Concerned that his followers receive a proper foundation of readings for their spiritual formation, Wesley collected a library of what he called, "the choicest pieces of practical divinity: from

³⁶Land, p.2.

³⁷So far as I know, this notion is virgin theological territory. The idea came in an informal discussion between Dr. Thompson and myself a few months ago on the subject of Pentecostal ascetic theology. Thompson is an instructor at the Church of God School of Theology.

³⁸Information about Macarius is sparse. In 1921 A. J. Mason published his translation of the Homilies. Most of my information on Macarius is taken from R. N. Flew The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology, (Oxford: University Press, 1934), pp. 179-188.

³⁹John Wesley, A Christian Library, 30 vols., (London: T. Cordeux, 1819), V. 1, p. 69.

the long and rich tradition of the spiritual masters throughout the ages." Macarius' "Fifty Spiritual Homilies" earned a place in Volume One (of thirty) because "What he continually labors to cultivate in himself and others is the real life of God in heart and soul . . . to be daily sensible and more of a living union with him as such."⁴⁰ During a stormy voyage John Wesley entered in his diary, "I read Macarius and sang."⁴¹

R. N. Flew, in The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology, outlines the theology of Macarius along four characteristics:

1. A pronounced individualism. Immense stress is laid on the worth of the obituary human soul...His principle of exegesis is that everything in the Old Testament has reference to the individual soul, made in the image of God and fallen under the Kingdom of darkness.
2. A belief that the true life of the soul is God-given (i.e. Christ-mysticism, Macarius expects tangible communion with Christ through the Holy Spirit.)
3. A doctrine of gradual moral progress which lays much stress on the freedom of man's will and on the violent struggle against sin that is necessary for one to reach.
4. The "great measures of perfection."^{42, 43}

⁴⁰Wesley, p. 71.

⁴¹R.N. Flew, The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology, (Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 179.

⁴²Flew, pp. 179-188.

⁴³Wesley was introduced to Macarius through his association with Thomas Deacon and the non-jurors, a primitivistic Christian group who separated themselves from

Macarius speaks of twelve measures or steps to perfection. The final stage, constant ecstasy in communion with God, is in this life only temporary. Indeed if a man were always to dwell at that height he would be unable to minister the Word to others.⁴⁴

He could only sit in a corner, aloft and intoxicated. So the perfect measure has not been given [in this life], in order that he may be free to take an interest in his brethren and in the

the Church of England. In 1733 Deacon asked Wesley to write an article on fasting for a book of worship he was producing on behalf of the sect. Wesley was particularly moved in that direction from his new found interest in church history, and particularly the stationary fasts (Wed. and Fri.).

Wesley had been encouraged to keep the stationary fasts in 1732 by John Clayton, another non-juror, who came to have a considerable influence on Wesley in his Oxford Holy Club days. Wesley, thereafter, included the Stations in his devotional pattern.

Deacon's book of worship was published in 1734 under the title A Compleat Call of devotions. Wesley's article appears on pages 72-73 commending the keeping of Wednesdays and Fridays for fasting. Wesley believed stationary fasting to have been instituted by the Apostles and observed throughout the ancient church. Keeping the fasts was a Christian imperative.

The addition of this rigorous discipline was not without fruit. Steve Harper, in his Ph.D. dissertation, "The Devotional Life of John Wesley" writes, "The result of Wesley's writing [the article] was a revival of activity in the Holy Club. Membership increased. By the end of 1733 group meetings were held each night of the week. At the same time Wesley's personal devotional life appears to have thrived....The end of 1733 saw Wesley's private and public devotional life in better condition than it had been at any other time during the year" (p. 173). For more detail on Wesley's relationship with the non-jurors see Harper, (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms Inst. , 1981), pp. 148-175.

⁴⁴Flew, p. 185.

ministry of the Word.⁴⁵

The eleventh step, one accessible in this life by grace, is that in which one has, as it were, "been caught up to the third heaven," and tasted "of things unlawful to speak" but has returned in order to preach again and take an interest in his brethren.⁴⁶ By grace and human effort, with Christ as the ever-present center of the heart, redeemed persons can stand on the eleventh step, "in ineffable fellowship of the heavenly King."⁴⁷ A person on this level gives "true prayer, prayer in the Spirit" and "true charity,"⁴⁸

That John Wesley was impacted by Macarius is of little doubt. Furthermore, the direct link between Wesley's spiritual theology and that of the holiness and later the Pentecostal movements has been aptly demonstrated by others. Pentecostal spirituality as a whole and its attitude toward disciplines such as fasting does seem to bear a Macarian imprint. In reading many current authors' (in and outside the Pentecostal tradition) attempts to "systematize" Pentecostal theology and praxis I am consistently amazed that this link with something akin to Macarius' eleventh and twelfth steps is overlooked.

⁴⁵Macarius, Hom. 8:4.

⁴⁶Flew, p. 186.

⁴⁷Macarius, Hom. 4:15.

⁴⁸Macarius, Hom. 31:4.

As Dayton notes, glossolalia isn't the central focus of Pentecostalism. Even supernatural gifts such as healing are not the goal sought by Pentecostal people (though this may sometimes be the case for those who prefer the label "Charismatic"). What an old line Pentecostal lives for are those periodic experiences of penetrating the veil of the holy place. This may occur in private prayer but is most likely found in corporate worship. It is this passion for the presence, akin to Moses' petition, "Show me thy glory!" (Ex. 33:18), that motivates and informs all else in Pentecostal spirituality. The words of William G. MacDonald, Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism illustrate this point. He writes that Pentecostal theology is a

Christ-centered, experience-certified theology....One of the chief contributions that Pentecostal theology has to make to the Church at large stems from its championing of a dynamic experience of God. Belief in the availability of God's pre-eternatural power and presence is foundational. It means a theology of a God-near-at-hand, who gives abundant evidence of his powerful presence in the Church. This theology concerns itself with a deep and ongoing experience in God.⁴⁹

Despite the clear connection between Pentecostalism and its Wesleyan-holiness ancestry, Pentecostals exist also in a spirit of discontinuity with their "distant

⁴⁹William G. MacDonald in Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism, ed. by Russell Spittler (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), pp. 62-63.

relatives." The discontinuity arises in that early Pentecostals expressed a unique sense of calling and apostolic identity apart from that of their more established church brethren. In order to understand the mentality behind such an expression, we will examine the historical development behind the growth of a "representative" Pentecostal denomination.

The Church of God (Cleveland, TN) traces its birth, curiously, to a Baptist preacher named Richard G. Spurling. For two years (1884-1886) he struggled to reform his church brethren to a pattern of "holiness" in the face of the creeping modernism and liberalism of the day. His voice was largely unwelcome. After two years he and his little group of eight tired of the scorn and opposition. They established themselves as "the Christian Union,"⁵⁰ and began to seek and search out a purity of heart and life by which they might more directly encounter the presence of God.

In Joel Chapter Two the call goes forth, "Yet even now," says the Lord "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly" (12, 15). For ten long years the small fellowship met in each other's homes under a Joel-like spirit of repentance. With the death of Spurling, his son, Richard G. Spurling,

⁵⁰Conn, pp. 3-10.

Jr., took up the torch, travelling up to fifty miles per weekend on foot "preaching to individuals he met in the way, debating with antagonistic preachers, praying and weeping constantly."⁵¹ His preaching was largely denunciatory, defining and repudiating the sins of the church. For ten years "the Union" had little success in terms of converts. These were years of turning, cleansing and repenting as they prepared their hearts and lives for a move of God they could not have comprehended at the time.

In 1896 three men, one a Methodist, came into the area of Coker creek, preaching of an experience of positive holiness. "Their understanding of holiness," notes Conn, "was strictly Wesleyan, and they proclaimed that they had received an experience similar to that which John Wesley had received on Aldersgate Street, London, on May 24, 1738."⁵² They spoke of the glory promised in Scripture of being "partakers of the divine nature."

In the manner of Spurling they began to walk the rugged mountain trails, excluded from churches, preaching to everyone they met, Bibles in hand, proclaiming that the power of holiness had come. A revival began among some other Baptists. The men, "Billy" Martin, Joe Tipton and "Milt" McNabb preached at the community schoolhouse, that they had experienced "sanctification" and that it was

⁵¹Conn, p. 14.

⁵²Conn. pp. 16-17.

available to all earnest seekers.

Says, Conn,

"The three evangelists were not able ministers by any stretch of the imagination but were 'uncommonly good talkers' in the estimation of those who attended the meetings What they lacked in preaching ability, theological training and understanding, they made up in earnestness; all three were given much to prayer and fasting . . . and the results were unprecedented."⁵³

Spurling's group sensed that this was what they had been searching for and quickly moved to join this group. The holiness doctrine soon swept the mountains like wild fire. When the revival ended, the evangelists moved on leaving behind a small but strong church.

One Wednesday night, no pastor present, the people gathered in earnest prayer. Certain ones became totally enraptured in the presence of the Lord and began to speak in unknown languages. (Their ignorance of church history prevented them from knowing that such manifestations had occurred sporadically throughout church history.) Others listened, amazed, and recalled the story in Acts Chapter Two and Peter's words

"This is what was spoken of by the prophet Joel: And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams . . . And I will show wonders in the heaven above . . . And it shall be that whoever calls on the

⁵³Conn, p. 18.

name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:16-21 RSV).

Obedient to Joel's call to fast and repent, they had become heirs to the promise and had experienced the inbreaking of a discernable presence of God. This experience forever established an ecclesiology that this congregation was eschatological community on mission.

Hans Kung says this was also the theology of the first century church

This [manifestation of the Spirit]... was the essential difference between them and other religious groups in Judaism (the apocalyptic sects and the Qumran community) and in the hellenistic world (gnosticism and the mystery religions): only the community of Jesus Christ had received, through their glorified Lord, the Spirit of God as the guarantee and firstfruits of salvation. Only they could therefore make 'demonstration of the Spirit and power' (I Cor 3:4; cf. I Th. 1:5)⁵⁴

Kung adds, "The Spirit of the risen Lord, is the sign that the last days have begun and have been fulfilled, but have not been finished and consummated."⁵⁵

Early editions of the official Church of God voice, The Evangel, reveal this sense of having been called into an eschatological community. In an Evangel dated April 13, 1920, Mrs. Clyde Haynes writes of a worship service where one Brother Churchill "gave an inspiring and soul-stirring

⁵⁴Hans Kung, The Church (N. Y.: Image Books, 1976), p. 168-169.

⁵⁵Kung, p. 168.

message about the Church of God.... The Lord is truly blessing His church in these days, He is rising above persecution and shining forth in the glory of the Lord in these days when the darkness of unbelief and false doctrines are covering the earth." She ends the letter, "Your sister in Jesus, and watching for the return of our Lord" (p. 4).

As an eschatological community, early Pentecostals were deeply impressed with a sense of urgency and mission. That mission was to spread the news, to evangelize by scripture and story in light of the soon return of the Lord. But the whole world was trapped in darkness. How to set them free? How does one wage eschatological war with the spiritual powers of Satan? Only "the presence" and the consequent anointing could equip one for such an intense spiritual contest. Paul had written centuries before, "For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds" (2 Cor 10:5 RSV).

For early Pentecostals the task was to fight their way, like the angel in Daniel 10, past the demonic forces of this world into the presence of God. There they could deliver their petitions and receive divine instruction and empowerment. Believers relied heavily upon fasting in times when demonic opposition seemed especially strong. In

the same letter mentioned before, Mrs. Haynes speaks of doing spiritual warfare as a church for one solid week.

"The powers of darkness began to give back and the glory of the Lord began to fall upon us." Later she says that on Sunday "some of the saints from Cortez, Manatee and Wimauma (Fla.) would come in and help in the battle, and God poured out His Spirit in power and blessing. These were great days of feasting with the Lord" (in contrast to the fasting of the week before).

Fasts were of a corporate nature and were sometimes many days (or even weeks) in length. In an Evangel published in May of 1919 a church published notice that, "We have decided to sanctify a fast...at my house here in Hardy Station, Miss. to pray for more power.... We would be glad [if] the ministers who attend the assembly [a camp meeting of sorts to be concluded the week before] would come prepared to stay with us through the fast. We expect to pray for souls and great power."

"Fasting for souls" was a common way of interceding for lost or backslidden friends as this excerpt from the Evangel dated April 13, 1920 shows, "One of the saints was overcome [i.e. was oppressed by demonic forces so that he "fell into sin" and ceased attending church]...we wanted to pray for him but he was not willing. We held on to God and after fasting three or four days he became willing, called in some of the saints and was wonderfully reclaimed. Well,

glory, it seemed like heaven was in our midst. I have never realized such love before."

Fasting was also seen as a necessary precondition for certain healings. Mrs. Mary B. L. Shepherd tells of holding a revival meeting in Tyler, Texas. While there she heard of a man, fifty-four years of age, who was dying with cancer. His doctor, a cancer specialist, said he couldn't live more than twenty-four hours. Her description of the situation and of the outcome is powerful enough to warrant a lengthy quote.

The cancer was on his lips, chin and throat and was a horrible thing to look upon, as it had slowly eaten his lower lip and chin away. The doctor had said that the inflammation had gone down the throat to the stomach and there was nothing that could be done.

He looked so pitiful, his throat and stomach were swollen and he had not eaten anything for several days. His fever was high and he was suffering intensely.

I prayed with him and went away and began a fast. I called in several of the saints at Lyra and we prayed for him, anointing him in Jesus name. Twas wonderful to see how the Lord touched him. All the swelling was driven away and the fever all left, the pain was also gone. He arose and dressed himself, ate a hearty meal and went to the meeting that night and testified to his healing. In a day or two the cancer fell out and the place was healing over when I left. He came to the meeting every night and was earnestly seeking the Lord.

She closes, "Dear Saints, dare to undertake great things for God. Truly the harvest is ripe and God wants to show His might power to the lost world....We will accomplish these things for Him who said He would give us power over

all the power of the enemy" (Evangel 4-13-20)⁵⁶

This community, as we have seen was brought into being by God's immanence. That same immanence directs and empowers its ministry. The loss or absence of immanence, then, is the greatest possible threat to the community. Any such loss must be addressed, attacked and overcome. The hindrance, whether it be human (sloth or sinfulness) or demonic, must, for the sake of the community and its mission, be removed.⁵⁷ Fasting is, throughout the brief history of Pentecostalism, a mighty weapon of warfare in such crucial times. One fasts to gain entrance to God's presence, knowing that His presence alone is the key to deliverance.

Romara Dean Chatham's research indicates that this particular sentiment is still very much alive within those members of Pentecostal tradition allied with their holiness roots. In a survey of 265 classical Pentecostals from virtually every state and outside of the United States she found that only five had never fasted. Twenty-two had

⁵⁶The archives containing microfilm of The Evangel and many other original source documents pertaining to Pentecostalism are housed in the Pentecostal Resource Center of the Hal Bernard Dixon, Jr. Library in Cleveland, TN and are available to scholars with an interest in the subject.

⁵⁷In 1986 the Church of God celebrated its 100th anniversary. The theme "The Anointing Makes the Difference" reflected this understanding and a wholesome fear that in our "coming of age" we might, like Samson, lose that anointing that God might choose another flexible wineskin to bear his presence.

fasted longer than one week. Their chief concerns were lost souls and finding the will of God. Interestingly, her study showed that the ranking of those concerns was somehow related to whether one was clergy or laity (laity being slightly more concerned about lost relatives than finding God's will through fasting).⁵⁸

By far, the majority of Pentecostal believers live outside of the confines of the United States. Seventy percent (70%) of the world's 332 million Pentecostals are non-white. Their numbers are growing at approximately 54,000 per day or nineteen million (19,000,000) per year. Sixty-six percent (66%) of these live in the third-world. Eighty-seven percent (87%) live in poverty.⁵⁹ How fasting is experienced in such a setting is the focus of the next chapter.

⁵⁸Romara Dean Chatham "A Treatise on Fasting," thesis presented to the Church of God School of Theology, May 1982.

⁵⁹All statistics taken from David Barrett International Bulletin of Missionary Research 12:3 (July 1988), p. 119-129.

CHAPTER 4

Reason: Fasting in the Jamaican Cultural Context

It is well to go away at times, that we may see another aspect of human life which still survives in the East, and to feel that influence which led even the Christ into the wilderness to prepare for the struggle with the animal nature of man. We need something of the experience of the Anchorites of Egypt, to impress us with the great truth that the distinction between the spiritual and material remain broad and clear, even if with the scalpel of modern philosophy we cannot completely dissect the two; and this experience will give us courage to cherish our aspirations, keep bright our hopes, and hold fast our Christian faith until the consummation comes.¹

Introduction

Imagine a red sun just cracking the immense blue horizon magically illuminating a crystal, azure sea. The mild surf gently laps against the warm sand beneath your toes. You stroll leisurely down the pristine beach. The aroma of chicken barbecuing on an open spit fills your senses, awakening your appetite. You are overwhelmed with the beauty and fertility of the land around you. Bananas,

¹J.P. Cook, Scientific Culture (N.Y.: m.p. 1884). Cooke was then Professor of Chemistry at Harvard University.

coconuts, massive tangerines and sweet sun-ripened grapefruits surround you, begging to be savored slowly. This is no illusion. This is Jamaica. When Columbus first beheld it in 1493 he sighed, "It is the loveliest land eyes have ever encountered."² Indeed, Jamaica is a paradise in many ways. After a failed experiment with socialism during the 1970's, the economy is making vigorous strides. Improvements made to the Montego Bay Airport, coupled with an aggressive governmental involvement in tourism have made Jamaica one of the world's premier vacation destinations. The past few seasons have seen over one million visitors per year. It isn't unrealistic to expect tourism proceeds to break \$1 billion in 1990.

With the Reagan administration's "Caribbean Basis Initiative," hundreds of new clothing factories have opened in the Kingston and Montego Bay area. Thousands have been employed in this way.

Besides this, Jamaica is witnessing the birth and expansion of a bona fide middle class (always a sign of hope in a Third World country). On the whole, the prospects for education and employment are better today than at any time in the past ten years.

Even in Eden there was a snake, however, and through the serpent came temptation and the fall. The "snake" in

²Paul Zach, ed. Jamaica, (Hong Kong: Apa Productions), p.29.

Jamaica is relentless poverty, the legacy of the same colonialism that birthed the United States.

The slave system imported thousands of slaves from the gold coast of Africa. Like cattle they were sold to the highest bidder. Family bonds were disregarded. Eventually all semblance of nuclear families among the blacks was erased. This made them more manageable, to be sure, but at what price?

The worth of a male slave lay in his ability to produce. He labored to produce both sugar cane and human offspring. Strong, thick boned blacks were "bred" with like women to produce field hands. Those of mixed blood or of exceptional intelligence were like wise "bred" to produce house servants and business managers. This loss of dignity and near total destruction of nuclear family bonds sowed seeds of violence and poverty that are still being reaped nearly 150 years after the abolition of slavery.

Today, 70-80% of Jamaican births are still illegitimate. The average Jamaican earns \$1,100 (U.S.) per annum. Unemployment is estimated by the government at 20.5%.³

These long standing conditions create a feeling of hopelessness, particularly among Jamaica's youth (50% of the population is 17-years-old or less). Lack of

³The Statistical Institute of Jamaica, (84 Hanover Street, Kingston, Jamaica) Annual Report, 1987.

opportunity for personal betterment begets a feeling of confusion and despair. Out of this confusion arise temptations.

The first of these temptations relates to the slave past of most Jamaicans. From the onset of puberty a substantial portion of the national population wades into what Donald McGavran in 1946 called "The Dark River" of fragile and temporary sexual encounters.⁴ At one point in 1988 illegitimate births reported from Kingston Public Hospital reached 95% of total deliveries. The cycle perpetuates itself: unwanted, poorly cared for children become producers of unwanted, poorly cared for infants.

The anger generated by such a system leads many youths into drug cultivation and abuse. Four years ago the U.S. Customs service estimated that the flow of drugs from Jamaica to America was valued at \$900 million. Many a young man has grown rich and died young because of the drug trade.

The competition between drug barons for control of this lucrative operation leads frequently to gangland executions of prominent national figures and local laborers as well. A type of violent thief, the "gun men" make their

⁴See Donald McGavran Church Growth in Jamaica (n.p.: n.d.). Though this study is over thirty years old it still clearly elucidates the staggering social dilemma faced by Jamaica and other former colonies. This small book is best obtained from Dr. McGavran personally by writing to him at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA.

living from the spoils of murder, rape and robbery. Many of those who aren't yet hardened in crime make their way as con-men and petty thieves in the tourist areas.

This chaotic environment creates and nurtures a powerful need for religion in its broadest sense. In desperate situations we instinctively seek to control the mysterious forces of evil that threaten to overwhelm us.

Before the introduction of Christianity by Baptist and Moravian missionaries in the seventeenth century, Jamaican slaves continued to rely upon the animistic beliefs of African religion to control their chaos. In the three hundred years between that period and modern times, animism, satanism and Christianity have mixed syncretistically into what some believe to be the "true" native religion of Jamaica.

This mixture exists today in two distinct forms: Obeah magic and Pocomania or "Revivalism" as it is often known. A comparison to the American distinction between "black" and "white" witchcraft may be justified. The Obeah is connected with the darker side of the occult. Their elaborate rituals often include the blood sacrifice of a chicken or goat as in Haitian Voodoo. For casting or removing curses they charge an incredible fee.

"Chineyman," the night watchman for our church (a non-Christian) was devastated by the mysterious deaths of three of his children in the space of a few months. Like many

lower class Jamaicans, his immediate interpretation was that a malevolent relative or neighbor had "worked Obeah" on him. His natural response was to seek out a more powerful Obeahman to provide protection from the curse (usually through a ceremony and the investment of a charmed ring).

The other option would be to go to a spiritist of the revivalist tradition. This person mixes symbolic acts of deliverance with vague incantations and bush medicine to bring deliverance "through Jesus and the Holy Ghost." What do they have in common? Both rely heavily upon fasting to gain entrance to and power in the world of spirits. Arthur Wallis, in God's Chosen Fast writes,

Without a doubt there is a very close connection between the practice of fasting and the receiving of spiritual revelation. Many non-Christian religions...practice fasting because they know its power to detach one's mind from the world of sense, and to sharpen one's sensibility to the world of the spirit.⁵

Fasting in Pocomania - Mother Wyndette

In September of 1988 while doing research for this dissertation I visited a revivalist "prophetess" named Mother Wyndette. The rains following hurricane Gilbert were still falling as I guided the car along the narrow

⁵Wallis, p. 73.

footpath between the long stone fences to her country home. Her home was small, five rooms in all. Each one measured about 10 ft. by 10 ft. The outside was curiously painted in alternating blue and white. Flags flying from bamboo poles could be seen at various places around the property. Beside her house was a larger building, made of bamboo, painted red and yellow, the "church" she called it. Behind her house and removed from it was a row of three, one-room apartments. They were painted bright pink and served as housing for the many "pilgrims" she entertained. Though most were Jamaican, some came from as far away as Germany. They came seeking deliverance from repeated bad luck, physical illness, or a general dissatisfaction with the course of their lives. Some stayed longer, seeking "conversion" (an ecstatic state wherein one senses their soul departing their body, followed by uncontrollable shouting and shaking). After obtaining it they were released to follow her in "doing God's work."

I was welcomed into the home by a young girl and seated in a small room dimly lit by the soft orange glow of a kerosene lamp. Soon Mother Wyndette arrived, a thin light skinned woman with an ancient face. Her eyes were coal black, set within large dark circles. In her mouth at various places were a few darkened teeth. Her head was covered with something resembling a nun's habit. On her bony hand she wore a large onyx and gold ring, given her by

her dead husband. With it, she claims, came his mighty gift of prophecy.

I caught her on the 21st day of an extended fast. She has fasted every Monday for 49 years. Monday is her big day, the day when her followers gather to fast with her and pray. They pray and worship to the beat of drums and tambourines. The beat of the drums increases in speed and intensity until the group becomes ecstatic, frantically shouting and jerking, overcome, they say, by the spirit.

I questioned about her life and work. Below is a portion of the interview. I have translated her dialect into American English to aid the reader.

Question: How did you get involved in this?

MW: As I exited the womb I began to chant "Womb, O' Womb." So they knew I was a token. I had spiritual powers at birth: healing, foretelling death...

Question: I know that you fast often, why?

MW: The spirit drives me into it. It takes away my desire for food...(She raises face and hands upward and breaks into a chant-like song.) I must fast to get into the spirit so as to perform my powers.

Question: I know there is an Obeah up the road. How is your work different from his?

MW: His is De Lawrence (malicious, strongly satanic). Tan (his name) says that when I heal or solve someone's problem I am stealing from his business. He threatened to burn my house down (using demon spirits). I replied "You are fire, but I am water." My work is a pure

work (i.e. beneficial and benevolent).⁶

Christian Fasting - Ivy Mitchell

During the interview I discovered that she was related to a strong Christian woman, Ivy Mitchell, who served as the clerk of one of the churches on my district. Her life is a model of Christ's self sacrificing love. She is honored throughout the rural community of Georges Valley. I knew her also to be a woman of weekly fasting and was curious to hear her opinion of Mother Wyndette and her fasting practice. On the way home I stopped by her cottage. She was disturbed that I had even spoken to Wyndette. Below is an excerpt from our discussion.

Question: Mrs. Wyndette says her work is pure. What do you think?

IM: Many years ago I lived in Kingston and had a job at a shoe factory. I was 18 and unsaved. One day I got a letter from my mother ordering me to leave my job. My mother and sister were into Wyndette's church at that time. When I got home my mother explained that mother Wyndette had gotten in the spirit and saw that I was in danger at the factory.

Mother took me to see her (MW). She filled a glass with water, made me drop a half day's wage into it. She (MW) then said that my boss' wife, out of jealousy had somehow taken some hairs from my head and was working Obeah to make me go mad. She made me a prescription from bush medicines and gave me a salve to rub on me for protection. I got up and left disgusted, feeling dirty and shamed. I have never seen her face again.

⁶Personal Interview at her home in New Hall, Manchester, Jamaica, September 21, 1988.

I got saved later. I left and made a way to a true church, paving the way. Eventually my mother and sister followed me.

Question: If she can do what she claims in the way of miracles, how?

IM: They call on fallen angels down there. They call them by name. Once they attacked the church. (i.e., Everything started going wrong. There was no liberty in worship.) Elder Lewis had to face them down about it. They called down a curse on him. He threw out their (sacred) water, tore down their flags and rubbed out the X on the floor of their church.

Question: Tell me about your fasting.

IM: I started 32 years ago, shortly after my salvation. At first, I only fasted when the church called a fast or when the Spirit led me. Later I began to fast with Sister Reid from Tuesday at 6 p.m. till Wednesday about 3 p.m.

Sometime I fast two to three days with nothing to eat or drink. Often I skip breakfast to set myself aside. I read Scripture and meditate upon it, then I sing hymns and pray.

Question: What is the true meaning of fasting?

IM: Fasting is intended, according to Isaiah 58 to break the yoke, to set prisoners free. One should be benefitted. It is important to have one purpose in mind for the fast, one person in trouble, one situation needing remedy. Focus upon that.

Question: Would you encourage young Christians to fast?

IM: Oh, certainly. I encourage them to fast to battle anti-Christ pressures in their work place, or to understand the Word of God better. There is a word of concern though. If fasting is not done out of the right motive the spiritual forces causing certain conditions could become more dangerous toward you.

Question: What do you mean?

IM: You must first fast against your personal besetting sins, before trying to battle a condition binding others, lest that condition attach itself to you.

For example, if you have a nervous condition you must first fast against that before entering into spiritual warfare because fasting causes spiritual burdens, stress and strain on your physical man and your mental state. Sometimes you could get more emotionally disturbed.

Get someone else (stronger) to fast for you first. Then fast for yourself till stronger -- then fast to deliver others.

Question: Won't prayer alone work?

IM: Fasting is used where one might have been getting counsel or praying about conditions that just won't move -- a greater weapon is needed. The last and greatest spiritual weapon to master a spiritual warfare is prayer-and-fasting.

Question: Why does fasting work?

IM: Fasting is effective because of its special sacrifice and denial of food, duties and work. You set yourself aside as a sacrifice to God--if you have no food in the house you cannot fast.

You fast because there are conditions that call for, demand the highest attention--earnestness.

It increases one's power in the Spirit. It increases one's special love for God and the things of God. It increases interest in the business of the Lord.⁷

Though there are some vague similarities between Mother Wyndette and Ivy Mitchell (e.s. both fast weekly; both have a well developed theology of spiritual warfare).

⁷Personal Interview at her home in George's Valley, Manchester, Jamaica, September 21, 1988.

there are patent differences: Ivy Mitchell, unlike Mother Wyndette, is not for hire. Ivy Mitchell, unlike Mother Wyndette, does not blend sorcery with Christianity. Most importantly the testimony of Sis. Mitchell places her squarely in the Christian mystical tradition. She is an orthodox disciple of Jesus with an uncommonly sacrificial ministry to others. Such a ministry, she believes, calls for constant spiritual readiness, thus the one day fast per week.

The Mandeville Fasting Service

By far the most famous faster in Mandeville, Jamaica is Sis. Mavis Reid. She is a short, intelligent woman with a quick wit and a winning smile. Her fasting service draws over one hundred participants every Wednesday. They come from as far away as Montego Bay (90 miles) by public transport, by foot, and by taxi to the fellowship hall of the Mandeville New Testament Church of God. There from nine a.m. to three p.m. they join together for singing, testimony, Scripture study and prayer coupled with "the weapon of fasting." This isn't a new thing. Sis. Reid has been directing the corporate fast for nearly twenty-eight years.

The highlight of the service is "the table of remembrance" which is set at the altar. The table is soon

piled high with tangible expressions of the spiritual needs brought to the house of God. Those without a home borrow a door key and lay it on the table. Others with marital or family problems deposit their wedding band. Many place empty wallets, others denied a Visa to a developed nation lay their passport before the Lord. The hymns ring out:

The Lion of Judah
can break every chain.
And give us the victory
again and again.

The group gathers around the table for concerted intercession on behalf of the needs expressed. After a confident "Amen" the articles are collected by the owners who sometimes sing:

I am delivered, praise the Lord!
I am delivered, Glory to His Name!
I was bound and in chains in the
mirey clay.
But now I'm delivered, praise the Lord!

The next hour is given to a sharing of testimonies regarding what great works God has done on their "case" since the last week's meeting. The testimonies produce faith in the hearts of others still waiting for their breakthrough. Here are some examples.

Miracles of Healing

In 1980 God began doing miracles of healing as a result of "the fasting" (as it is locally known). One Wednesday the Holy Spirit impressed Sis. Murray (one of

Sis. Reid's assistants) that they must "expect a man." The meeting ended with no stranger appearing. Walking the trail to the main road, Sis. Murray encountered a crippled man limping along with a cane. "This is the man!" she thought. She ushered him back to the Reid's cottage (where the meeting was held in those days). After the laying on of hands and prayer, the group rejoiced to see the crippled leg completely whole. The man left without his cane, praising God for the power of Jesus' stripes to heal.

Shortly thereafter such miracles increased. An aluminum company executive had a daughter who had an incurable hemorrhage. The physicians had tried but failed to remedy her situation. One night the child's mother drove her car to the road's end and led her daughter along the narrow trail to the cottage. After prayer she was instantly healed.

Six month's ago Edna Powell brought her baby to the fasting. The child was three and hadn't yet taken the first step. God answered the prayer of the group. The next morning the child began walking.

Wombs Opened

Barrenness is as disconcerting to a Jamaican woman as it was to women like Elizabeth in Bible times. Many non-

Christian men will either abandon a wife or begin to keep "concubines" if she fails to produce children. This problem often makes its way to the altar on Wednesday.

Six years ago Mrs. Lenora Mackenzie was desperate. After four miscarriages it was apparent that her uterine muscle structure simply could not support a baby. She was doomed to childlessness. During prayer the issue was brought before the Lord. Sis. Reid felt led to grab a nearby towel, roll it tight and place it in Mrs. Mackenzie's arms as a symbolic way of saying, "God has heard your cry." Shortly thereafter, she conceived and delivered without further incident. Sharee is approximately five years old and a regular attender of children's church.

A young unmarried lady in the church, Delores Smile, had huge and multiple ovarian cysts. A local surgeon wanted to go in and remove them. He warned her, however, that the process would probably require a hysterectomy. Barren, she would have little chance of finding a husband. Again the matter was presented on Wednesday. She refused the surgery. She was married two years ago to a fine Christian minister. My wife and I stood before the altar a few months ago as the godparents of their newborn son, Philip.

But Mavis Reid will be the first to tell you that healing is not really her gift. Her special ministry is

broader in scope, manifesting itself in the healing of broken relationships, the opening of educational/vocational opportunities and in permanent deliverance from poverty. She teaches that such conditions are akin to a huge stone which retards both individual and corporate liberty and development. "Fasting intensifies faith in God's Word," she says, "The Word is God's hammer. It may not destroy the hindering stone with one blow, but if you will strike a blow, week after week, and hammer the condition again and again it will soon weaken, crack, then turn to powder. Then, praise God, you'll go free. This is the promise of God in Jer. 23:29, "Is not my word like as a fire? Saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?"

Healing of Broken Relationships

The Scripture declares, "The King's heart is in the hand of the Lord...he (God) turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. 21:1 KJV). It follows, then, that God can turn the heart of a rebellious spouse back to the marriage relationship. Two testimonies illustrate that truth.

One year ago a man stood in the fasting and told this story:

Fourteen years ago my wife did a terrible terrible wrong to me and our family. I spoke to her about it but she refused to relent. A few days later she just walked

out, cold and bitter. We hadn't seen her since then.

A few weeks ago the situation began to weight heavily upon me. I brought the matter before the Lord here and asked him to restore my wife.

The next day she knocked on the door. Calling the family together we listened to her sincere apology. We have forgiven her. She is now back home. Our marriage has never been so sweet.

A short while later another lady came with a similar story. She lived with an arrogant and abusive husband. She too brought the matter for prayer and fasting weekly. "I began to notice a gradual but real change in him. The home used to be a prison filled with tension, now there's such peace I hate to ever go out."

Deliverance From Closed Doors of Opportunity

Joseph Thompson was the father of six children. His wife labored over an outdoor fire to prepare the family meals. One Wednesday Joseph brought the matter before the Lord. As he prayed he heard an airplane going overhead (an unusual occurrence). A voice said, "Go tell that plane to save you a seat." He argued momentarily but finally got up, went outside and shouted "You airplane, save a seat for Joseph Thompson!" Nothing seemed to happen. A few days later at his work as a tailor a customer came in complaining. "I really need to go to Grand Cayman to get

some new merchandise but I just cannot go at this time." Joseph piped up "I can go for you." Thrilled, the man returned with an airline ticket, money for the merchandise and some extra cash for Joseph's trouble. Joseph secured a passport and was off for Cayman. While there he used his cash to buy merchandise to sell for himself. That cycle repeated itself seventeen times that year. By the end of the year Joseph had made enough to build a home and equip it with modern appliances, most of all, a gas stove.

His brother, Junior, got inspired and petitioned God for a business of his own so as to provide for his family as well. He put the word out that he was looking to purchase a business. On the street he got a message. A local retailer wanted to see him. Hustling down to the shop he encountered the owner. "I hear you're shopping for a business," she said. "How do you like retail sales?" "Oh," replied Junior, "I think this store would be a wonderful investment." Then the negotiations began. She queried, "How much money can you offer me?" He reached in his pocket and pulled out all the money he had, laying the ten dollar bill in her hand. "Well," she smiled, "if this is all you have you'll need it to put gas in the van. It goes with the store." With that the deal was concluded, "Just pay as you go."

Junior soon realized the store's location was poor. He liquidated all the merchandise, paid for the business

and still made a nice profit. Today he is a leading Christian businessman and owns three stores which have grown out of that original ten dollar investment.

That isn't the best money miracle to come out of the fasting. Two years ago an aged woman rose to testify. Her story was so delightful that I have attempted to preserve it word for word. (Again, I have translated the Jamaican Patois into American English for the reader.)

I haven't been here for a while so I thought I would say what great things God has done for me. As you know I was so poor I didn't have a house to live in. I paid rent for an old shack.

One day Sister Reid preached, 'Get out of that rented house or you'll never get on your feet.' I decided to trust God for a house of my own.

Going home I met a man at the bus stop selling little pigs [usually \$70]. He begged me to buy the only pig he had left. I told him I'd love to help him but I didn't have the money. He asked how much I had. I showed him three dollars. He took it and gave me the pig.

I took the pig home on the bus and anointed it with oil "in the name of Jesus." I took special care of it. Soon it was over 450 lbs. I sold it and bought some cement blocks for my new house. Someone came by and asked what the blocks were for. I said, "God's giving me a house; this is the start." The man gave me some cement. Others gave me the rest. I have moved out of my rented house into a house of my own, Praise the Lord.

Her simple faith was met by the cheers of the congregation.

Mavis Reid

Over the years I have served in Jamaica, I have watched with amazement the powerful ministry of Mavis Reid. Her faith in God is extraordinary. I asked her about her ministry.

Question: Where did you learn to pray?

MR: When I was nineteen, a new convert, I read "The Kneeling Christian." It changed my life. I became very frustrated at seeing older Christians leave the bedside of the sick without even offering a prayer. I decided I would be that kneeling Christian. I began to pray for everyone after that and God gave me a ministry of prayer.

Question: When did you start fasting?

MR: Shortly after I married. I had received the Holy Ghost. Brother Reid was seeking but hadn't been filled as yet. Also, his mother was unsaved. These two things were on my heart.

Then one day I sent my son to the grocery to credit a tin of shoe polish and a piece of rope on my bill. The man sent him home saying, "No more credit for you." I turned my face to God; we were so poor. I cried, "How can I live?" He answered "Live by faith!" "How do I live by faith?" The answer, "Fast and pray and you will know."

I did not like to fast alone so I asked Sis. Murray whom I respected to come fast with me about these burdens I had. We fasted all day, sang and shared together. After prayer Sis. Murray said, "The fasting is good." and decided to return again the next Wednesday.

The next week my husband did not go to work on Wednesday. He joined us. As we prayed I felt to tell him, "Say Praise the

Lord!" He did and was instantly filled with the blessed Holy Ghost. Since then I have been on this road of fasting and prayer.

Question: Define spirituality.

MR: Oh, (she laughs) that is hard. Everyone is gifted differently. It means living a dedicated life; discipline is very important, especially singing and prayer. Spirituality means "being available to the Spirit of God to be used for the benefit of others."

Sis. Reid has said many profound things to me over the years. In her fasting services I have noted six recurrent themes: (1) The Purpose of Fasting. Sis. Reid displays the attitude of Bro. Lawrence (1670) who wrote, "All bodily mortifications and other exercises are useless, except as they serve to arrive at the union with God by love."⁸ For Mavis Reid, a health body is essential. Fasting must not be abused so as to break one's health. For that reason she normally fasts only 24 hours.

One fasts for focus. It helps the intercessor pour heart and soul into one request. It is a way of doing spiritual warfare with powers, principalities and whole social systems that contribute to the bondage of men, women and children.

As with Ivy Mitchell (a close friend) she builds her fasting theology from Isaiah 58. Fasting is the kneeling Christian's last resort against material, social and

⁸Bro. Lawrence, The Practice of the Presence of God, 1670, (Va. Bch, Va: CBN Press, 1978), second conversation, p. 18.

relational bondage. It hammers the rock and lets the oppressed go free. Such a mighty weapon must not be used selfishly. "When fasting I forget my own kids. For a while I kept praying for Tony when he was building his house that God would help him find the money. But God said, 'Don't tell me so much about your children lest you lose your interest in others.' I know that he'll make a way for them if I'll be faithful to my ministry."

(2) A Point of Contact. She teaches that it is valuable to objectify one's desire. A concrete object, somehow symbolic of the one being fasted for, enables one to pray with better focus and intensity. General prayers aren't as effective as specific prayers. The material object, whether it be a key, a wedding band or a picture keeps the prayers intact. Sometimes God chooses to reveal the answer to a prayer through symbolic acts.

She once took Delores Smile (the young lady healed of fibroid tumors in her ovaries) into her mother's room under the influence of the Holy Spirit. She opened the wardrobe and found a wedding dress. Removing the veil, she placed it on Sis. Smile's head. Soon afterward, Rev. Lou Senior asked for her hand in marriage. If this seems strange, one should recall the symbolic methods used by the Old Testament prophets and by the Prophet Agabas in the New Testament, "And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet and said, 'Thus

saith the Holy ghost, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle and shall deliver him into the hands of the gentiles" (Acts 21:11 KJV).

(3) Speak to the Condition. When in fasting about a certain condition or situation, it is important first to "pray through." We must know that what we desire is clearly the will of God. After ascertaining the validity of the request, however, it is necessary to act. Jesus once returned from a mountain to find a mob taunting his disciples. They could not heal an epileptic boy or cast out the demon behind his condition. After Jesus successfully delivered the boy, the disciples asked why they hadn't the ability to heal the child. Jesus replied tersely, "Because of your unbelief" (Matt. 17:20 KJV). He went on to explain "Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say to this mountain, remove...it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you" (Matt. 17:20). After praying to the Father regarding the death of Lazarus, Jesus speaks no more to God but to the corpse, "Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43 KJV). Christ commanded unclean spirits to leave (Luke 8:29); rebuked a fever (Luke 4:39); and cursed a fig tree (Mark 11:14). Peter is amazed at the power of a command spoken under the authority of God. "Master, behold the fig tree which thou cursed is withered away." Jesus replies "Have faith in God," and repeats, "For verily I say unto you,

that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, be thou removed, and be cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith" (Mark 11:22, 23 KJV).

Having the will of God revealed through prayer, we stand as God's co-workers (I Cor. 3:9) and take authority over the situation in Jesus name. Like a sheriff we are given the authority and responsibility to enforce the will of the court. All the resources of the Kingdom stand behind us when we go out to execute the will of God.

(4) Humility is the key to success. The Mandeville New Testament Church of God was started by Sis. Reid in 1983. I came on as pastor in 1984. The church experienced over 100% annual growth for four years. The attendance when we left in November was over four hundred. Throughout that time she served as "Church Mother" and participated in the Council of Deacons. She sums up the success of the church and the fasting service this way: "Humility is the key to success in Mandeville. See God in His power and glory and seek after His way. It is very good when people underestimate you. God has a very limited use for a boastful, self-promoting Christian. The plow that breaks the fallow ground (Jer. 4:3; Hos. 10:12) is humility."⁹

⁹Mavis Reid, "Stand Still," a sermon delivered at the Mandeville New Testament Church of God on July 11, 1988.

(5) Deliverance comes through relationships. One of the first things I ever heard Sis. Reid teach was, "Never take any handshake for granted. I never like for anyone to come into my life without knowing why." She believes that most opportunities for spiritual and social advancement come through one's being attentive to relationships God orchestrates for us. We do not grow spiritually or otherwise, apart from other people. It follows then that right relationships are a top priority if we are to prosper.

From some people we learn spiritual truth, from others how to care for our health. Through relationships business opportunities come to us. The right contact can open any closed door. She cautions, "Never despise any of these little ones. The man may collect garbage off the street but you will need him one day. You may have a problem getting through with a government agency. His uncle works there." She often stresses the pattern of how whole nations were saved because God had somebody in a position to know somebody else (e.g. Esther's relationship with King Ahasuerus). "If you will sincerely love and care for each person you meet, God will use them to open doors for you. Your personal life will be enhanced and all the work of God will get done."

Many in America today have become skeptical concerning the supernatural working of God. Such a person may be

tempted to express cynicism toward spirit movements as a whole. Land makes a valid point,

"Spirit Movements have usually originated among the poor and then are criticized for being 'an opiate of the people.' But if they create a counter culture of priestly care and prophetic engagement these charges are vitiated. Poor people cannot be faulted for mistrusting the world's social mechanisms and use of power."¹⁰

This bring us to Sis. Reid's final emphasis: The righteous poor will be vindicated. Orlando Costas, Latin American missiologist and advocate for Third-world concerns, has written,

The church should have room for all types of humans but especially for outcasts--the church is a paradigm of the new humanity God has created....

The gospel is particularly addressed to the poor....This is by no means a glorification of poverty. The Bible does to glorify poverty; it condemns it as a scandalous condition and demand justice for the poor. Precisely for this reason, God identifies himself with the poor.¹¹

Mavis Reid ministers to the poor. Most of the Wednesday fasters make less than \$20 (U.S.) per week. She doesn't blame "imperialism" or "the whites" for the situation. Sin is to blame. Patterns of sinful living keep the poor in bondage. The system will not change until people are changed. Her mission is to illustrate to the poor how

¹⁰Land, p. 18.

¹¹Orlando Costas, The Integrity of Mission, (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1979), pp. 78-81.

their own sinfulness contributes to the power of their oppressors. She holds out "redemption and lift" as everyone's solution to their dilemma. Her motto might well be "work hard, live right and watch for God to give you a break."

Sometimes the poor are wronged. A church sister, living in a one room house had her head crushed with a stone after objecting to a neighbor moving her boundary marker to his advantage. At other times the poor are stripped of their few feet of property by a rich man who can afford a lawyer knowing they cannot. With no advocate they are easy victims. Even in such situations, she condones no personal violence or hatred. God is a righteous Judge. He will repay. In those crises of faith the church turns to the impreccatory prayers of the Psalms and prays them with righteous fervor. Regardless of the might of the enemy, God will, in His time, vindicate the righteous poor. Prayer and fasting will not be denied.

Mavis Reid is a testimony to that truth. Once maligned and abused by church officials as a rabble rouser and disdained by the sophisticated as an ignorant country woman, she is today honored by the highest leaders of the denomination. She has even been introduced to the Ambassador of the United States (who kissed her cheek, causing her to blush). Now at nearly sixty years of age, she is currently a part-time student at Bethel Bible

College after being awarded a full scholarship. Still, her greatest desire is to minister to the hurting. She sums it up this way, "My life is built around people."

Conclusion

We have witnessed expressions of fasting in both the Christian and pagan traditions in Jamaica. Though both see fasting as a weapon in spiritual warfare, a great discontinuity exists between the two systems as to the methodology, motivation and theology behind such a use of fasting. All of the individuals quoted are fairly representative of the rank and file of Jamaica. These people, Christian or not, believe fasting a source of spiritual power. Would middle class Jamaicans, less acquainted with fasting, come to the same conclusion after a six week experiment with corporate fasting? That is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

A Six Week Corporate Fasting Experience

Introduction and Overview

This chapter provides a summary of the field research project. The project was conducted in Mandeville, Jamaica from April 9 to May 21, 1988. The purpose of the project was to answer two questions: Would modern Christians fast if encouraged to do so by someone perceived by them to be a spiritual leader? If they fasted, would they report advances in their spiritual development?

The project consisted of a group-emphasis experiment in fasting with fifteen (15) participants. The group met each Saturday for seven weeks and committed to fast at least one day per week for six of the weeks. The group was pre-tested using an attitude rating scale, a general spiritual inventory and a fasting experience questionnaire which I developed.

After six weeks of fasting experience and group interaction, the group was post-tested using the same instruments. The data gained from comparing the two tests strongly suggests that the participants had increased their actual practice of fasting and that they had grown spiritually as a result.

A follow-up test four months later suggests that the positive spiritual changes reported as a result of the fasting experience were enduring. The improvement shown in the group's actual practice of fasting, however, is apparently not permanent, as the frequency of fasting scores returned to the pre-test level in the absence of group encouragement and accountability.

Theory of Ministry

The practical out-working of this formational project came in response to five theories about ministry which I have developed. From personal experience, and from observation and dialogue with the experiences of others, I have come to believe that spiritual growth is best facilitated:

1. Through intentionality.
2. Under the guidance of a spiritual director.
3. In community.
4. Under tension created by spiritual disciplines such as fasting.
5. Without judgment of "degree" or level of spiritual status.

Let us look at each theory separately.

Although spiritual growth often occurs without much planning or forethought, it seems to be best facilitated by approaching formation intentionally. One grows best when one intends to grow and takes the measures necessary to eliminate that which interferes with growth. Convinced of this, I designed the group involvement to be voluntary and to require extra effort from the participants.

I believe that isolation in spiritual formation is a recipe for disaster. Though the desert hermits of the third century began their spiritual pilgrimage in earnest expectation of attaining Christlikeness, history shows that the experiment often failed. Their austerity in isolation caused them to become "famous" for their mortifications and prayer. Pride entered into the equation. Soon monks were engaged in fierce verbal attacks on each other. Everyone, it seemed, wanted to claim spiritual superiority.

To protect seekers against this subtle delusion of self, monasticism became communal. The church, by its very nature, is a community. Salvation and spiritual development take place within this community of faith. For this reason the experiment in fasting was designed to be experienced in community. I felt this would provide both a restraint against pride and a source of encouragement to those involved in the project.

Spiritual formation is best facilitated under the guidance of a spiritual director. This person must have the trust of the community, being perceived as "our pastor." The function of such a guide is threefold. Such an individual must be able to provide teaching and instruction in formation. Secondly, the guide organizes and promotes dialogue between members of the community of faith. He/she encourages members to "open up" and insures that the atmosphere is accepting and non-critical so as to facilitate openness. Finally, the spiritual guide designs and institutes structures of accountability for the community. This helps members of the group to "stretch" and attain to their highest potential.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the student holds to the opinion of Dr. David Moberg that spirituality cannot be measured. It can only be described by the individual. A correlative is that openly articulating the movement of grace taking place spiritually is itself a sign of ongoing formation. Perhaps this was the understanding behind John Wesley's bands and societies. To describe the struggle within and to confess orally to the community our confidence in God's ability to complete His work within us is itself formative (Rom. 10:9).

The Process

The contextual project consisted of an eight week covenant group which met every Saturday to study what the Bible had to say about fasting. Members of the group committed to fast at least once per week over six weeks. The participants, all volunteers, were drawn from an existing ecumenical cell group of which I was chairman. The group met on Saturday mornings from 9 a.m. to noon to study and process that week's fasting experience. Participants were pre-and post-tested with an instrument designed to note changes in attitude toward and practice of fasting. Also noted was any change in the participants' overall spiritual health as they perceived it.

Composition of Covenant Group

Despite efforts to recruit men for the group, the final sample proved 86% female. On the first week the male population was 31% of the total. Four of the men dropped out along the way and thus were eliminated from the sample. The high ratio of women to men is perhaps a bit higher, but roughly parallel to the ratio of men to women in church attendance generally in Pentecostal churches in Jamaica.

The group of fifteen participants was fairly young (average age 28.2 years). Sixty percent (60%) were married. All were solidly middle class. The average income after taxes was J\$1808.12. (The Jamaican minimum wage is \$260 per month). The group was eighty-seven percent (87%) employed or enrolled in college full-time. One person (6%) was seeking employment while one other (6%) was a homemaker by choice. Occupationally, twenty percent (20%) were college instructors, forty percent (40%) were in upper level management or owned their own business. The remaining thirty-three percent (33%) were full-time college or high school students.

Theologically, the group fits into what Peter Wagner and others are calling "the third wave." They are members of mainline denominations (Brethren, United Church of Jamaica, Anglican) who would avoid labeling themselves "charismatic," but who nevertheless are in the forefront of church renewal, including an openness to the manifestation of tongue-speech and other charismatic gifts. The ecumenical fellowship to which they all belong, "New Life for Mandeville," falls along the same line. The weekly meeting takes place in a prominent hotel. It revolves around worship, testimony and Bible study.

I chose this group for the project because of their relative ignorance regarding the practice of fasting compared to the members of my official charge in the New

Testament Church of God. On the first questionnaire eighty-seven percent (87%) of the respondents said they did not know enough about fasting to teach even a young convert. Though sixty-three percent (63%) reported fasting sometime in the last year only thirty-one percent (31%) could recall fasting in the last two months. According to the guidelines of Henerson et. al., the second question is a more accurate indicator of the true fasting practice of the individual than the first. The average length of time spent fasting over the last two months was less than one day. A second reason for using this group was that they were already meeting together weekly to encourage each other in spiritual growth and to learn from the Scriptures (i.e., they evidenced some intentionality about their spiritual pilgrimage).

Intent of the Project

This project is designed to be descriptive, not diagnostic. It is pastoral, not scientific, in nature. Its intention is to answer the following questions: Would Christians fast if encouraged to do so (through teaching and example) by their spiritual leaders? Would modern believers, introduced to fasting, report advances in their spiritual development akin to those claimed by fasting Christians in the early days of church tradition? In the

course of answering those questions we may also be able to make broader application of the group's experience. The stated intent, however, is limited to answering the above questions.

The Project Unfolds

March 26	April 9	April 16	April 23	April 30	May 7	May 14	May 21	Sept. 15
Call for parti- cipants	1st Ses. pre-test	2nd Ses. S.F. & the body	3rd Ses. Fasting for Rev- elation	4th Ses. Fasting and poor	5th Ses. the	6th Ses. Fasting and Inter- cession	7th post- test	grp. re- tested

On March 26, 1988, after having met with New Life's Board of Directors I announced to the regular Saturday attendees that a six week experiment in fasting would begin on April 9. I asked that they pray over the next two weeks and consider participating.

The enthusiasm of the April 9 session was high. Initially, twenty-two persons committed themselves to the project. I explained the mechanics of the project and how it related to my D. Min. program. The group then completed a four page instrument (see Appendices A, B, C, & D) that consisted of an attitude rating scale (Appendix A & B), a general spiritual inventory (Appendix C & D1) and a questionnaire pertaining to the participant,s personal fasting experience (Appendix D2).

The Attitude Rating Scale dealt with the participant's general attitude toward the discipline of fasting. I attempted to fashion it after the guidelines of Henerson, Morris and Fitz-Gibbon in How to Measure Attitudes.¹ It was divided into three sections: a semantic differential (attempting to uncover the participant's initial reaction to the word "fasting"), a ranking scale (to ascertain the relative value of fasting to the participant in comparison with other means of grace such as prayer and communion), and a Likert scale (to allow participants to respond to numerous positive and negative attitudes connected with fasting.)

The general spiritual inventory was one and a half pages long, divided into two sections. Section one called for participants to honestly evaluate themselves along a line of growing, holding or regressing in regard to their present experience of joy, church attendance, gratitude, self-denial, etc. Section two was similar, calling for participants to mark their present state along twenty-four (24) continuum (e.g., spiritually hungry/lethargic, or quiet/nervous).

Section three (Appendix D2) asked for details on their personal experience with fasting. Eight questions covered the participant's previous fasting history, frequency of

¹Marlene Henerson, Lynn Lyons Morris and Carol Taylor Fitz-Gibbon, How to Measure Attitudes, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1978).

fasting and what forms their fasting took.

A separate, anonymous questionnaire (Appendix E) asked sex, age, educational background, employment and average monthly income. Given the national Jamaican love of discretion, the level of participation in completing such a form evidenced the high amount of trust already existing in the group.

Session one (April 9): The first session lasted about two hours. The complete instrument, calling for honesty and self revelation, took most participants one hour to complete. The reflective process brought a seriousness to the meeting. Many participants remarked that being forced to evaluate their spiritual condition so thoroughly raised their hopes for growth during the project. The session concluded with a time of prayer that we would be especially open to the moving of the Lord.

Session two: "Spiritual Formation and Your Body" went off as planned on April 16. Using the recent "fall" of Jimmy Swaggart as a case study, we explored the mysterious link between body, soul and spirit.

From Romans 8:4-14 we discovered that "the flesh" (sarx) in Pauline Theology is not the same as the body (soma), but that the power of the flesh is somehow grounded and based in the body. In verse 5 we saw that the body's desire for survival makes it totally self-absorbed. Incapable of discernment, it seems to simply follow stimuli

(e.g., sex with anyone would be enjoyable to the body regardless of the personal damage that might result from it). Finally, we saw that though it is "our weaker vessel" the body too will be redeemed and transformed in the resurrection. Other important Scriptures were 1 Cor. 6:9-20 and 1 Cor. 9:27 on the need to discipline the body for the welfare of the whole, and Rom. 12:1-2 which answered our natural question, "What shall we do with this contrary body of ours?" We will master it and present it to God a living sacrifice: hands that will show mercy, feet to do His bidding, a mouth to speak His Word to the weary.

We discussed Augustine's view that health or lack of health in one "part" of a person influences the other parts. For example, a sick body tends to bring discouragement to the soul. On the other hand, a healthy soul will see to it that the body is well cared for. This led to a discussion with a dietician who was visiting the group on the health benefits of fasting.² After hearing of the potential damage caused to the body by eating four pounds of (often toxic) chemical additives per year, everyone was ready to fast by the end of the meeting.

The group was given a common theme for each week's fasting day(s). The coming week's focus was "Fasting for Self-Revelation." Participants were encouraged to follow

²For more information on this topic see Kirban, pp. 48-53.

the model of John Cassian, who fasted to agitate "the demons" within his soul so that he could identify them. By naming the controlling spirits (or for our purpose "negative mental constructs"), Cassian was able to begin to wrestle free from their influence and dominion in his life. We closed by discussing Richard Foster's statement, "more than any other single discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us."³

Session Three (April 23) was entitled "Fasting for Self-Revelation," and centered around obtaining guidance from God through times of prayer and fasting. Early on we established the doctrine that God desires and delights in being approached for guidance (Isa. 30:21; 42:16). From Col. 1:26-27 and John 14:23 we learned that "Christ in you" is the source of all revelation. The primary ministry of the Holy Spirit is to guide us "into all truth and to show [us] things to come" (John 14:26; 16:12-27). Several individuals gave testimonies of specific instances of guidance they had received from God.

We then explored the question, "What hinders us from receiving revelation and guidance?" After naming many things we settled upon one chief "demon," the "demon of distraction" or in another manner of speaking, a fragmented mental focus.

³Richard J. Foster, Celebration of Discipline, (NY: Harper and Row), p. 48.

Focus, we came to believe, is the chief component in a believer's consistently being able to discern the voice of God in the Babel of our modern world. This is why David cried, "One thing here I desired of the Lord" (Ps. 27:4). Fasting aids in focusing our thoughts and prayers.

We settled upon Daniel 9 as a good example of a person fasting for revelation. Daniel didn't say "God called me to a fast" but "I fasted because there was something I had to know." He fully expected to find the answer to his question by meeting God in fasting. Throughout Scripture fasting is associated with dreams and other means of revelation (Dan. 1:12, 17; Acts 10:10; 1 Cor. 11:27 which leads into "visions and revelations in Christ" in Ch. 12.) We concluded with Isaiah 58:10 and 11, which promises divine guidance to those whose fasting and prayer is backed up with a lifestyle commitment to righteous living. The focus for the next week's fast was to list one matter on which guidance was needed. Participants were encouraged to fast and press beyond the distractions around them until they clearly heard God's voice on the matter.

The Troubling Letter

After this meeting, the project's original plan was interrupted, and totally refocused. On April 28 I received a letter from my advisor, Dr. Steve Harper, in response to

some cultural issues I had raised with him earlier. I had explained that although most Jamaicans have blood ties to Africa, the covenant group was solidly middle class and thus, much more European than African in world view, culture, etc. Because of this, I argued, a discussion of similarities between Africans and lower-class Jamaicans was unrelated to this particular project. While accepting my argument, he raised a related issue I had never thought of:

Is the fact that your audience is more European a sign that they are aloof from the rest of society? Has their "European-ness" become a place to hide from authentic living in Jamaica?⁴

I read those questions to two members of the covenant group who dropped by our home that evening. The stunned look on their face revealed that I had touched a sensitive nerve. After a long silence, Karen said slowly, "Wow, this is a matter we must look into." Believing this to be a teachable moment, carefully orchestrated by the Holy Spirit whose guidance we had sought, I abandoned the next week's outline, "Fasting for Purging and Repentance." In its place I inserted, "Fasting and the Poor."

Christians living in the Third World are daily confronted with the issue of poverty and their obligation

⁴Steve Harper, personal correspondence dated April 21, 1988.

to respond to it. Hardly a day goes by when a beggar of some sort doesn't approach one's gate to ask for food or money. Some are alcoholics, some con-men or thieves wanting an excuse for a closer look at your home. Many are victims of their own undisciplined lifestyles. Others are truly in need. They have one thing in common. If you give to them they'll be back. If you turn them away some will remind you that as a Christian you have a duty to give to them. They may get angry and curse your greed or threaten to hurt you. Every now and then, however, a refusal is met with the crushed look of one for whom all hope of finding help has just been lost. No true Christian can take the plight of such a person lightly. Individually, we had discussed the issue many times. Now the Lord was leading us to approach Him about it as a group. In His penetrating light, the closets of our heart were exposed and cleansed. Fasting would serve as a catalyst in this time of cleansing.

Session Four (April 30): "Fasting and the Poor" began with a study of Isaiah 58. One point of that passage is that fasting should increase our solidarity with the poor and lead us into concrete acts of mercy toward them.

One group member has a Jewish background. He reminded us of the provisions made by God in the Law to avoid, or at least control, poverty in Israel. For example, every family was given land (the poor who own land and a home

will hardly become destitute). The sale of this land was restricted. The regulations requiring a sabbath year and the Year of Jubilee released the poor from their misfortunes. Likewise, God prohibited the keeping of pledges overnight, and required the daily payment of wages to common laborers.

In our discussion we agreed that in an agrarian economy like Jamaica's many of these measures could be still applied by middle class Christians on behalf of their domestic help and day workers. There I shared the questions raised by Dr. Harper. Many seemed to agree that "the middle class" was at times aloof. Then I stopped the discussion, "We are the middle class. All of us are middle class people." I had no idea such an innocuous statement could trigger an emotional explosion.

One group member immediately lost all composure and began to rage against such an accusation. (Keep in mind that under the Manley-Castro Socialist regime of the 1970's the title "Middle Class" symbolized everything wicked and oppressive about colonial rule.) After clarifying the sociological meaning of the term I restated the point of Dr. Harper's inquiry. "Are we using the benefits of being blessed financially and educationally to avoid living with the real Jamaica?" One hour of lively exchange followed.

During that time some group members came to realize that deep inside they were actually angry at the poor.

They felt used. A few shared of past attempts to help the less fortunate. Their benevolence had been stifled by a spirit of dependency and a lack of initiative on the part of the ones they intended to help.

One member, who had been abroad during the socialist years, said this,

I think the anger we feel at the poor is actually a reaction against the breakdown in Jamaican society. We hate to see this happening to Jamaica and we take it out on the poor. Before Manley you never saw beggars in rags eating out of the garbage. When I arrived home in Jamaica I was grieved at what I saw. The beggars on the street are now beggars knocking on our door.

We encouraged each other to confess honestly our true attitude toward the poor. Some felt that the poor were the cause of their own poverty and that of their children. (Some poor women with no means of support seek out casual sexual encounters in hopes that by bearing a child for a man she can "hook him" into giving her some grocery money each week.) One resisted the idea that the poor were, in fact, the wards of the middle class. "I worked hard to move out of poverty. I made it. I will help my extended family to do the same. Why can't they [the poor outside of her family] do the same? Why must I provide for all of them?"

We ended the meeting without attempting to resolve the issue. We decided to fast for solidarity with the poor and

to ask God to conform our attitudes to His on this matter. One group member suggested that we cease generalizing about "poverty" and "the poor" and name at least five poor people with whom we are connected. We determined to spiritually carry them before the Lord with us as we prayed each time. We would try and see life through their eyes. We would ask God how we could best help them in the long run.

All week long participants wrestled with this troubling issue. Through phone calls and informal visits we continued to process what was going on inside us. We knew that the Holy Spirit was at work and did our best to invite His skillful hand to do surgery on the thoughts and intents of our hearts.

Session Five continued the topic, "Fasting and the Poor." We decided that the relationship between Christians and the poor people in their sphere of influences was probably the most important discipleship issue in the Jamaican context.

With James 2:1-6 we discussed subtle ways we favor the wealthy over the poor in our local church. Reading "The Rich Young Ruler" in Matt. 19:21ff, we explored how this man's wealth would have affected his relationships with the other disciples if he had been allowed to keep it. We asked ourselves if our relative wealth was a wall of division between ourselves and other members of our local church.

We focused upon a theology of servanthood and stewardship in connection with the teaching of Jesus forbidding the exclusion of the poor from our social life,

When thou makest a dinner or a supper,
call not thy friends, nor thy brethren,
neither thy kinsmen nor thy rich neighbors;
lest they also bid thee again and a recompense
be made thee.

But when thou makest a feast, call the poor,
the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt
be blessed, for they cannot recompense thee:
for thou shalt be recompensed at the resur-
rection of the Just.

(Luke 14:12-14 KJV)

We concluded that God requires those seeking his favor to evidence a concern for all who are "weaker" than themselves. This applies especially to blood kin, and to other poor people known personally by the Christian. Jeremiah 22:16 insists that the only way to truly come to know the Person of God is through redemptive relationships with the weak.

During the dialogue the group came up with seven objectives behind our ministry to the poor. We give:

1. As an act of obedience to God;
2. As a tangible expression of God's sacrificial love;
3. In hopes of planting seed in the recipients that will one day lead to their conversion;
4. In such a manner as to help the recipient become self-supportive; thus we avoid fostering dependency or a feeling of indebtedness on the part of the recipient;
5. So as to strengthen the position of the weak;
6. Teaching them also to give of what they have to others who have even less;
7. In such a way as to protect (and in some cases help

restore) the dignity of the recipient.

Certain members confessed that even in their giving to the poor they expected something in return, gratitude. When the poor did not seem grateful for what they had been given it made the givers angry. We agreed to spend another week in repentance over this matter. We felt that our hearts were in better alignment with God's than they had been last week, but were not satisfied that we had seen things clearly even yet.

We decided to fast again for solidarity and to focus on strengthening the bonds we had with the poor in our lives. We would attempt to love them, spending time in conversation with them, listening more than talking. We would offer to help them acquire skills (and education if they were so inclined). We would stand as their advocate if they were abused and would use our influence to find jobs for those who needed them. Regardless of how inconvenient the interruption, we would respond to beggars or to the requests of our own domestic helpers with due respect, considering how we might help them in the long run. We would pray for God to send those to us that were in genuine need and pledged to show His kindness to them whenever they called.

Session Six (May 14) was entitled, "Fasting and Spiritual Warfare." After a study of Eph. 6:10-13, Dan.

10:12ff and Matt. 17:21, we had defined spiritual warfare and agreed that fasting somehow boosts the power of our prayer in times of spiritual conflict. We said that a resolution to fast and intercede was, in a sense, a militant act, a declaration of war against some unseen spiritual force holding someone in bondage. In partnership with God (1 Cor. 3:9) we use the weapon of fasting, and pray earnestly against the plans of the enemy. Like a curved lens, fasting focuses the spiritual energy of our prayer.

During the group discussion, the thought emerged that tenaciously interceding for another's welfare is the greatest service one can render. We decided to include fasting and intercession as the foundation of our several ministries to the poor. Surely, if we could regularly intercede for them our relationships with the poor would become more Christ-like.

Session 7 was dedicated to closure. The group was post-tested during the first hour, using the same descriptive instrument as before.

The second hour was spent reflecting on the past weeks. As one participant, a school teacher shared,

I have some students, good girls, but their academic work was in a nosedive because of jealousy and divisiveness in the group. Their [college entrance] test is fast approaching. I called them together and told them to join me in prayer and fasting

that God would work this thing out. And you know, as soon as they did I began to notice a change. Their interpersonal problems are getting ironed out. They have unity again and their school work shows it.⁵

Her daughter, Annette, had her story as well,

On my fasting day last week I took my lunch to school to give away. I looked, but everyone had a lunch. Walking home I saw a poor lady coming out of the public hospital.

I crossed over the street and gave my lunch to her. She took it and asked if I could give her some money for her bus fare. She was from the country so the fare was high. The only money I had was for my shoes. The cobbler had repaired them and I was heading to pick them up. I gave her the money anyway.

When I went for my shoes on the next day I asked the man how much I owed him for the work. He looked up at me and said, "Nothing--that's okay." The Lord provides when we obey him.

Another member, a young mother, responded, "The teaching of the poor had a great impact on me. We have to unlearn many of our culture's values. I have been taking money away from the poor and instead putting it away 'for the future' as though I didn't know that God had promised to provide for all our future." One of the men present claimed to have had a real breakthrough in attitude,

This week I went by Hi Lo [a large grocery]

⁵Mavis Forrester, personal testimony given at New Life for Mandeville weekly meeting Manchester Club, Mandeville, Jamaica, May 14, 1988.

and, no lie, there were five beggars surrounding the door like a gauntlet. I almost drove away rather than face them. Instead I paused and sighed "Lord, I can't go through that--Help me know what to do." I smiled at them, went inside and bought them all a patty [a beef pastry].

Then I went outside, handed them out and talked with them, asking about the circumstances of their life and listening. One of them is that young guy with crutches who I sometimes see walking without them. I've always resented him begging from me. I found out that he has sickle cell anemia and that his hip is rotting gradually away.

In the last few day's when I see any of them it's like seeing a friend out on his luck versus a leech who loves to pester me.

Not all the comments were that glorious. The three teens in the group struggled with guilt because at times they failed to keep their fast until the hour they had set. One of them, Kerry, sighed "These have been six rough weeks. April 13, I'll never forget that day. I learned the same lesson each week: My friends aren't as important as God. Every Wednesday [the fast day] I would lose friendship with someone."

All group members reported that the entire period had been a struggle, wars within and without. One said, "I had high hopes for this time. Then my workload became greatly increased, especially on fasting days. I had very little time for meditation." Even for him, however, the discipline seemed to pay off.

I did my first 48-hour fast. I noticed that my temper is improved. During a fast I had a run in with one of the drivers. He got drunk at work, went out on the road and ran his truck out of gas. He called me at night to say he had broken down. Because "emergency repair" is part of my responsibility I had to leave home after a hard day and work to rescue him. I was surprised at how cool I was when I discovered him asleep and the truck only out of gas.

For everyone it was a time of revelation and inward change. One teen said, "Fasting taught me to give away some of my valuable things. They had a hold on me." Another teen said, "I met an old lady burdened down with boxes, walking along the road. I felt compassion and carried one box for her. She was part deaf. As I walked with her, I heard everyone passing cruel comments at both of us. I seldom helped anyone before. I never noticed how mean people are to weak ones." One of the oldest participants said, "Fasting showed me my weakness, especially my anger and bitterness. All these years I have heard the complaints of other teachers. I thought I was above their humanity. God showed me my weakness."

One of the married ladies, a mother of three and a meticulous housekeeper, confided, "I guess we all have a void that needs filled. We tend to fill it with anything but God. The fasting showed me that I'm trying to find my fullness in my husband and the family. His fasting was a sin against our family time, my idolatry. Fasting definitely focused my attention on the "one thing" I should

be seeking after, intimacy with God."

The final testimony came from an upper level manager,

This fasting has improved my self-control. Even on non-fasting days it has made me more conscious of God and especially of my responsibility as a steward. I am much more concerned about the field workers. I get their pay slips out on time because now I realize how much they need their pay on time. I am looking at ways to increase their wages. We have a home building loan program for them. In the last few weeks I have even started giving people lifts as I see them walking. I drive one hour to work each way and think of how someone might have missed the bus [some run only once a day] to the market and have shot their whole day.

After a time of fellowship the meeting closed in prayer. I thanked each group member for their participation in the project. The group was then disbanded.

THE FINDINGS

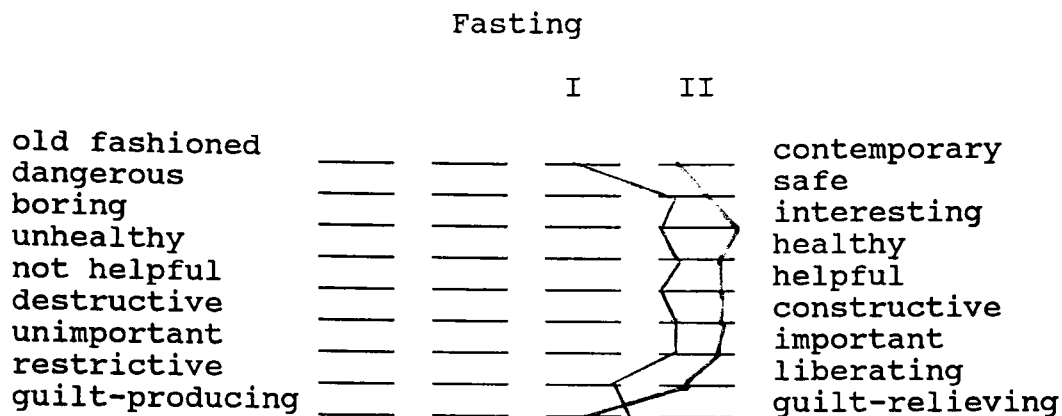
The data retrieved from the pre-and post-testing revealed that the attitude of the participants toward fasting was consistently improved after the six week experience. The actual practice of fasting improved dramatically during that period as well.

Pre-Test

The pre-test showed the majority of the participants already predisposed to a positive attitude toward fasting. This rendered a dramatic positive change impossible to demonstrate. Their lack of personal experience with the discipline caused them to shy away from either "strongly disagree" or "strongly agree" answers. Though most (83%) had fasted at some point in their life, the average fast had averaged only 11 hours. Less than half (42%) of the group could remember fasting in the last two months. When asked to rate the importance of fasting in their over all experience of the spiritual life (scale of 1 to 5; 5 is highest) they rated it at 2.2.

Post-Test

Sixteen participants completed the project. Only their scores were tabulated. On the Attitude Rating Scale, Section I demonstrates the consistent trend toward an even more positive disposition toward fasting. Note the marked improvement between Test I and II.



On the ranking scale, fasting moved ahead of corporate worship in order of importance after the six week experience.

II. Ranking: Rank the following items in order of importance for the development of spirituality in the life of the Christian. (#1 is highest)

<u>Pre-Test</u>		<u>Post-Test</u>		<u>Pre-Test</u>		<u>Post-Test</u>
6	financial giving	5		5	Lord's Supper	6
1	prayer	1		4	fasting	3
3	corporate worship	4		2	scripture	2
7	community service	7			reading	

Moving to the Likert scale, fasting "veterans" tended to have stronger opinions than before. Their responses move away from the neutral center toward "strongly agree" or "strongly disagree."

III. Likert scale: Please circle the answer that best summarizes your reaction to the statement.

Fasting is legalistic.

Churches should give more attention to fasting.

Fasting is physically dangerous.

Fasting is essential to spiritual vitality.

Fasting is spiritually hazardous.

Fasting produces pride.

Fasting aids in prayer.

Fasting causes depression.

Fasting makes one humble.

Fasting is only of marginal importance in the development of a spiritual walk.

Fasting is central to spiritual development.

Fasting is an excellent means of self-control.

Christians should fast.

Fasting aids good health.

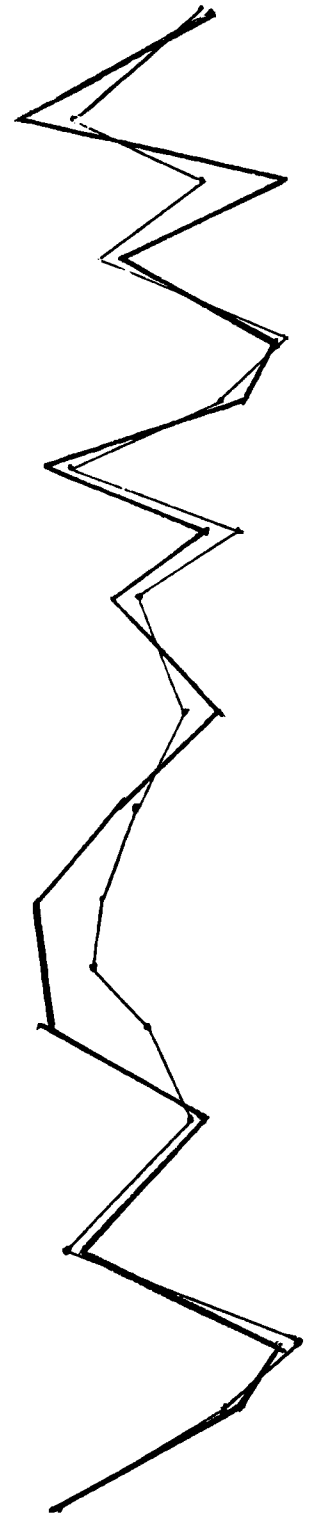
Fasting leads to inappropriate feelings of self-righteousness.

I would like to learn more about fasting.

Fasting would be an unnecessary interference with my life.

Fasting is needlessly ascetic.

Fasting would improve my spiritual growth and development.



SA A N D SD

Fasting is merely a human attempt
to earn the favor of God.

Fasting bring spiritual liberty.



We again note a movement toward an even more positive
perception of fasting than before the six week experience.

The Fasting Background section evidenced an increase
in frequency and duration of fasting during the period of
the project. All of the participants had fasted during the
six week period (100% participation). One who was pregnant
fasted only once but continued to be involved in the group
interaction. Fifty-eight percent (58%) fasted at least
once per week for six weeks, sixteen percent (16%) for five
weeks and sixteen percent (16%) for four weeks.

The average number of days spent in fasting "this
year" increased from 5.19 on the pre-test to 11.8. Those
fasting at some point in the last two months grew
dramatically, from 31% to 100%. The length of the average
fast increased as well from 11.15 hours to 20 hours.

The answer to the question, "How many periods of
fasting have you observed in the last two months?" moved
from 1.3 days to 7.7 days. In response to the question,
"On a scale of one (lowest) to five (highest) how important
would you say fasting is in your overall experience of the

spiritual life?" The group average rose from "2.21" to "3.4."

The most exciting data, from a pastoral perspective, came from the General Spiritual Inventory (Appendix C & D1). The G.S.I. was designed to aid the participants in assessing their overall spiritual health. The instrument was analyzed by attaching a numerical value to each point along the continuum.

Section I, Growth-versus-Regression was scored by assigning one point to "growing," two to "holding" and three to "regressing." The lower the score, the more consistent the growth of the individual was assumed to be. A decrease in points in the post-test would indicate new spiritual growth. Below are the average Section I scores for each individual.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Pre-Test</u>	<u>Post-Test</u>
1. Maxine	1.7	1.2
2. Sherry	1.85	1.14
3. Gem	1.85	1.66
4. Karen	1.71	1.50
5. Mavis	2.28	1.42
6. Heather	2.35	1.85
7. Judith	1.64	1.64
8. Betty	1.64	1.35
9. Nellie Ann	1.92	1.50
10. Dora	1.53	1.76
11. Valerie	1.07	1.00
12. Hugh	1.85	1.00
13. Conley	2.71	1.85
14. Julie	2.0	1.71
15. Kerry	1.42	1.07
GROUP	1.83	1.44

Though the group described themselves as (slightly) growing

in the pre-test, the lower scores in the post-test evidence a movement toward greater growth in all but two participants.

Section II of the G.S.I. (Appendix C & D1) called for participants to describe their present spiritual condition by placing a mark along a series of 24 continuum. This section was scored in a way similar to Section I. The four points on the line were assigned a scale value. The positive end was given the value of one (1) moving to four (4) at the negative end. After scoring each continuum, the participants overall score was averaged. Below are the results.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Pre-Test</u>	<u>Post-Test</u>
1. Maxine	2.41	1.87
2. Sherry	1.95	1.2
3. Gem	2.26	1.5
4. Karen	1.33	1.16
5. Mavis	2.25	1.50
6. Heather	2.35	1.85
7. Judith	1.95	1.95
8. Betty	2.04	1.66
9. Nellie Ann	2.37	1.08
10. Dora	1.79	1.73
11. Valerie	1.47	1.0
12. Hugh	2.04	1.83
13. Conley	2.08	2.00
14. Julie	1.70	1.58
15. Kerry	2.33	1.41
GROUP	2.02	1.55

Again we note the trend toward decreasing scores. This would seem to indicate an improved spiritual condition

as a result of the fasting experience. Some individual's second score is nearly one complete point lower than their pre-test score. The group score improved by half a point as well.

Follow-Up

Nearly four months after the completion of the project I re-tested the participants. I was interested to see if the improved spiritual condition reported in the post-test would continue in the absence of the group interaction. I was able to contact nine of the original fifteen participants. Testing them a third time yielded the following results.

General Spiritual Inventory

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Pre-Test</u>	<u>Post-Test</u>	<u>Follow-up</u>
1.	Sherry - Sect. I	1.85	1.14	1.85
	Sect. II	1.95	1.2	1.62
2.	Karen - Sect. I	1.71	1.5	1.28
	Sect. II	1.33	1.16	1.37
3.	Judith - Sect. I	1.64	1.64	1.92
	Sect. II	1.95	1.95	1.62
4.	Betty - Sect. I	1.64	1.35	1.28
	Sect. II	2.04	1.66	1.70
5.	Dora - Sect. I	1.53	1.76	1.42
	Sect. II	1.79	1.73	1.70
6.	Valerie- Sect. I	1.07	1.0	1.85
	Sect. II	1.47	1.0	1.58
7.	Hugh - Sect. I	1.85	1.0	1.0
	Sect. II	2.04	1.83	1.20
8.	Conley - Sect. I	2.71	1.85	2.57
	Sect. II	2.08	2.00	2.08
9.	Julie - Sect. I	2.0	1.71	1.64
	Sect. II	1.70	1.58	1.12

This chart is best understood by comparing column one (Pre-test) to column three (Follow-up). Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the participants follow-up scores were still improved over their pre-test score. Eleven percent (11%) had returned to their original score. Twenty-two percent (22%) of the scores were higher (i.e. worse) then that of the pre-test. Averaging the group scores gives us the following picture of the results.

	<u>Pre-Test</u>	<u>Post-Test</u>	<u>Follow-up</u>
Group Section I	1.83	1.44	1.64
Group Section II	2.02	1.55	1.44

In looking at the group's averaged scores we note a pattern. The highest score on both sections occurs in the pre-test. The post-test demonstrated the power of the group fasting experience. The scores show convincing improvement. During the interval of nearly four months between the post-test and the follow-up the enthusiasm of the group experience apparently wore off. The group scores ebb toward the pre-test level. They do not, however, return to that level. The end result still shows a considerable improvement over their original pre-test spiritual condition. According to their best efforts at describing and assessing their spiritual status the

participants did indeed grow spiritually from the group fasting experience.

CHAPTER 6

Summary and Evaluation

This chapter summarizes the content of this study on Christian fasting. The methodology behind the project is stated. The findings are summarized. The project is then evaluated. The chapter ends by discussing the broader implications of the project for pastoral ministry and by offering some suggestions as to avenues for future research in related areas.

The Problem

For thousands of years fasting has been an integral part of Judeo-Christian spirituality. Fasting is taught by precept and example throughout the Old and New Testaments. The early church maintained the practice. The experience of spiritual masters throughout the history of the church likewise affirms the importance of fasting.

Fasting is hard discipline. Modern Christians, especially in developed nations like the United States, seem to disdain discipline in general and fasting in particular. This has given rise to books like Richard J. Fosters' Celebration of Discipline and Margaret Miles' Fullness of Life which reassert the need for spiritual disciplines in our day.

My placement in a Third World pastorate allowed me to

witness the vibrancy of disciplined Jamaican Christians. Fasting, prayer and alms form the foundation of their practical spirituality.

Reading Joseph Tamney's Ball State University study of fasting in Muncie, Indiana caused me to ask two questions: Would Christians fast regularly if encouraged to do so by their spiritual leaders? Secondly, would modern believers introduced to fasting, report advances in their spiritual development? I knew of no research on this topic from a pastoral perspective.

The Methodology

Following the lead of David Moberg, I abandoned any idea of empirically quantifying and measuring spirituality. I was also influenced by Steven J. Land and Michael B. Dowd who assert that one explanation for the powerful growth and appeal of Pentecostalism is the oral-narrative nature of its theology and practice.¹ This led me to rely upon a descriptive format for the field research project.

A descriptive instrument of three parts was designed according to the suggestions of Henerson, Morris and Fitz-

¹See Land, op. cit and Michael B. Dowd, unpublished paper, "Contours of a Narrative Pentecostal Theology and Practice" delivered at Society for Pentecostal Studies Nov. 14-16, 1985.

Gibbon in How to Measure Attitudes. The first section dealt with the participant's attitude toward fasting. Section Two was a general inventory of the participant's spiritual life as they perceived it. A third section called for the participant's to report on their current practice of fasting.

Fifteen participants were pre-tested. The group met weekly for eight weeks. Six of those week's were committed to a practice of fasting at least one day per week. Upon the conclusion of the fasting the group was re-tested with the same instrument and disbanded. Four months later the same instrument was used to do a follow-up test to determine whether any behavioral and attitudinal changes reported on the post-test were permanent or not.

The Findings Evaluated

The pre-test revealed that the group already had a positive attitude toward fasting in theory. Their actual practice was minimal. Asked to report how many times they had fasted in the past year, 61% participants "guessed" they had fasted an average of five days in the last year. The remaining 37% admitted they hadn't fasted at all. Given a more specific time frame, the last two months, caused 69% of the group to report they hadn't fasted at all. Those who had fasted reported the average length of a

fast as less than one day. This same inventory saw the participants characterizing their spiritual lives as only slightly growing.

The post-test showed an increased appreciation for fasting. The attitude scale shows a marked tendency to an even more positive perception of the discipline. Moreover, the actual practice of fasting rose from less than one to an average of eight days fasting in the last two months. The first question behind the project has apparently been answered in the affirmative. Yes, modern Christians will fast if encouraged to do so by their spiritual leader.

More importantly, the post-test revealed that the overall spiritual condition of the participants had improved. Something about the experience moved them from a maintenance orientation to an experience of spiritual growth. The group records across-the-board improvement in areas of spiritual life as diverse as obedience, study and financial giving. The second question too seems answered. Yes, modern Christians, introduced to a practice of fasting will report spiritual growth.

Nearly four months later, nine of the subjects were contacted and again tested. The results showed that while some of the initial exuberance had faded, the attitude of the group toward fasting continued to hold strong. Overall spiritual conditions, too, remained at a higher level than in the pre-test.

The practice of fasting, however, returned to the pre-test level after the four month period. This squares with Leonard Stadler's earlier research on fasting as a means of grace. After a one day fast, his group recorded a much more positive attitude toward fasting. Interestingly, however, they did not increase their actual frequency of fasting afterwards. This leads us to a hypothesis that a regular routine of fasting is not likely to be established in the absence of outside encouragement. The high opinion of fasting held by the group may well lead them as individuals to fast in times of crisis or spiritual dryness. Perceiving themselves as spiritually healthy and growing may militate against a person's continuing their practice of fasting.

Problems in the Research

The findings of the follow-up test would have more validity if the entire group had been tested. All participants were contacted and given the forms. Six did not return them. One migrated suddenly. Another participant was travelling. The remainder were boarding students who returned to their homes when school was dismissed. I contacted all of the above while they were still in Mandeville but was unsuccessful in getting a response.

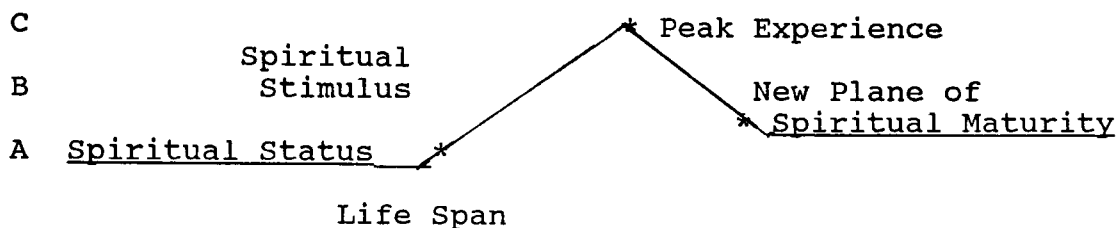
The instrument itself might be made more effective by rewording in three places. On the Attitude Rating Scale (Appendix B) one sentence reads "fasting is needlessly ascetic." The word ascetic was not well understood. A second place is in the section titled "Fasting Background" (Appendix D2). Two separate questions use the phrase, "How many periods of fasting have you observed?" The term "periods" is nebulous. The word should be changed to "days." The third problem area was in the first of the two questions, "How many periods of fasting have you observed this year?" The last two words, "this year" may have been a source of confusion. Some participants may have answered according to the calendar year while others may have gone back twelve months from the present (as verbally instructed). Besides the above concerns, the process and instrument seemed to function well.

Implications for Ministry

The overall success of the project has convinced me more than ever, of the importance of approaching spiritual formation with a corporate emphasis. It seems clear from the follow-up test results that the impact of the project would have been significantly diminished without the group interaction. Faithfulness to the individual's commitment to fasting was doubtlessly enhanced by accountability to

the group.

Comparing the pattern of the three tests leads me to conclude that spiritual growth emerges gradually by taking two steps forward, one step back. Persons seem to grow from A to B by way of C as the diagram illustrates.



It would appear that gradual growth, in the sense of a diagonal line upward, is not the human experience. Rather, we seem to be spiritually formed by our response to occasional crises or stimuli that force us to stretch ourselves and deepen our connection with God. Responding to the crisis or stimulus in faith generates a growth spike. At some point the experience peaks out. Our natural rhythm brings us off the mountain top. Equilibrium is restored, but at a more enhanced level than before.

This seems very much the pattern of the Biblical narrative. The people of God are "tried" by various turns of fate. Some turn away from such a rugged, narrow road. Others, however, endure the conflict in the wilderness and come forth as pure gold. They are given the victor's crown and thrones to sit upon.

It seems that God uses the events of our own history

to confront and challenge the adequacy of our present state. Such crises, then, must not be mollified or alleviated by the pastor. As spiritual director, he must challenge the one engaged in such a soul-struggle to join the community of faith as they too wrestle with God and with their own "demons." Together they will find healing and deliverance.

The wrestling of the participants in this study was often painful. As moderator, I had to steer the discussions away from open hostility. At the same time, everyone recognized the need to wrestle with the issue of poverty and Christian responsibility.

In the end, the actions of the group reflected the fruit of such spiritual warfare. One group member sacrificed to send her maid, an intelligent young lady, to business school at night. A local church established a benevolence ministry that helps pay school fees, etc. for poor families. A major focus of that ministry is the facilitation of marriage for common law couples. The church pays the fees, decorates the sanctuary and provides a banquet for the reception. One individual sold some of his assets to provide a retirement account for his old faithful housekeeper. The students of a local Bible college set up a scholarship fund for needy students at the local high school.

The fruit of a corporate spiritual encounter seems

rooted deeper than the level of emotion. Accountability to the group (as in Wesley's bands and societies) seems to work at a volitional level of response versus the catharsis experience often pursued by individuals in isolation.

Avenues for Future Research

It would be difficult to get a lay commitment for a fasting project much longer than this one. If such a group could be organized, however, it might be possible to improve the participants' practice of personal fasting permanently.

Secondly, would a practice of weekly fasting for one year prove spiritually liberating or would the routine of a stationary fast become a bondage to the participants? A related area to pursue might be to form two groups, one to keep stationary fasts, the other to go on an extended fast of seven days or more. Comparing the experiences of each group and the benefits each received would be beneficial to Christians interested in deciding which course their fasting journeys should take.

Epilogue

I am convinced that organized spiritual formation programs such as this one are workable and beneficial in

any local church. I anticipate organizing one similar group experience per year in whatever ministry setting I find myself. By participating fully in the experience, I was strengthened. The greatest encouragement, however, came through the weekly testimonies of struggle and growth from the participants. For me, that's what the pastorate is all about.

APPENDICES

ATTITUDE RATING SCALE

Description: This instrument is designed to measure attitudes.
THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS. Thanks.

I. Semantic Differential: Please place a mark at the place on the line that best describes your initial reaction to the word:

	Fasting					
old fashioned	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	contemporary
dangerous	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	safe
boring	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	interesting
unhealthy	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	healthy
not helpful	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	helpful
destructive	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	constructive
unimportant	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	important
restrictive	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	liberating
guilt-producing	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	guilt-relieving

II. Ranking: Rank the following items in order of importance for the development of spirituality in the life of the Christian. (#1 is highest)

_____ financial giving	_____ Lord's Supper
_____ prayer	_____ fasting
_____ corporate worship	_____ scripture reading
_____ community service	

III. Likert scale: Please circle the answer that best summarizes your reaction to the statement.

Fasting is legalistic.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Churches should give more attention to fasting.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Fasting is physically dangerous.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Fasting is essential to spiritual vitality.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Fasting is spiritually hazardous.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Fasting produces pride.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Fasting aids in prayer.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Fasting causes depression.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Fasting makes one humble.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Fasting is only of marginal importance in the development of a spiritual walk.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Fasting is central to spiritual development.	SA	A	N	D	SD

Fasting is an excellent means of self-control.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Christians should fast.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Fasting aids good health.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Fasting leads to inappropriate feelings of self-righteousness.	SA	A	N	D	SD
I would like to learn more about fasting.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Fasting would be an unnecessary interference with my life.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Fasting is needlessly ascetic.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Fasting would improve my spiritual growth and development.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Fasting is merely a human attempt to earn the favor of God.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Fasting brings spiritual liberty.	SA	A	N	D	SD

GENERAL SPIRITUAL INVENTORY

Section I Growth-vs-Regression: Place a mark along the line to mark the extent at which you are either growing or regressing.

compassion:	growing-----holding-----regressing
obedience:	growing-----holding-----regressing
self-denial:	growing-----holding-----regressing
gratitude:	growing-----holding-----regressing
joy:	growing-----holding-----regressing
prayer:	growing-----holding-----regressing
financial giving:	growing-----holding-----regressing
personal worship:	growing-----holding-----regressing
attentiveness:	growing-----holding-----regressing
fasting:	growing-----holding-----regressing
church attendance:	growing-----holding-----regressing
giving of self:	growing-----holding-----regressing
study:	growing-----holding-----regressing
servanthood:	growing-----holding-----regressing

Section II Continuum: Place your present spiritual condition at the appropriate spot on the line.

receiving guidance	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	self-willed
serving	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	uninvolved
gentle	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	insensitive
self controlled	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	self indulging
pure thoughts	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	lustfulness
generous	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	greedy
focused	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	fragmented
truthful	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	deceptive
high self esteem	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	low self esteem
edifying speech	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	gossip, talebearing
encouraging	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	discouraging
forgiving	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	blaming
confident	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	fearful
humble	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	proud

Spiritual Inventory, contd.

submissive	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	rebellious
spir. hungry	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	lethargic
peacemaking	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	fueling strife
giving	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	draining
full of faith	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	doubting
considerate	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	inconsiderate
quiet	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	nervous
at rest in Christ	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	worried, fretting
physically healthy	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	phys. unhealthy
temperate	*-----*-----*-----*-----*	gluttonous

Appendix D-2

Section III Fasting Background

*Have you ever fasted for religious purposes? yes no

If "no" why not? _____

*If "yes," what forms of fasting have you practiced?

_____ Absolute fast (no food or drink of any kind)

_____ Total fast (water only)

_____ Partial fast (any form of restricted diet)

_____ "Liquids only" fast

*For how long do you normally fast? _____

*How many periods of fasting have you observed this year? _____

*How many periods of fasting have you observed in the last two months? _____

*On a scale of one (lowest) to five (highest) how important would you say fasting is in your overall experience of the spiritual life? _____

*"I feel I know enough about fasting to teach some young Christian about it." agree or disagree

APPENDIX F

COVENANT GROUP ROSTER

<u>Name</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Church Membership</u>
Maxine	F	United Presbyterian
Sherry	F	Church of God
Gem	F	United Presbyterian
Karen	F	United Brethren
Mavis	F	United Presbyterian
Heather	F	Missionary Church
Judith	F	N.T. Church of God
Betty	F	United Presbyterian
Nellie Ann	F	United Presbyterian
Dara	F	United Presbyterian
Valerie	F	N.T. Church of God
Kerry	F	United Presbyterian
Julie	F	Missionary Church
Conley	M	Missionary Church
Hugh	M	United Brethren

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